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BY JENEEN INTERLANDI

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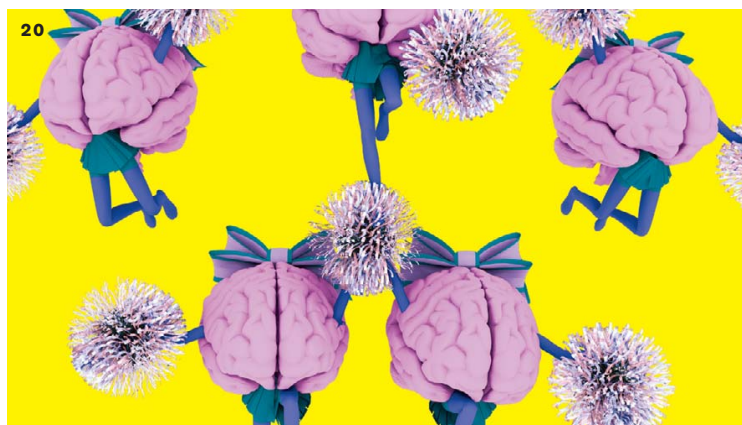
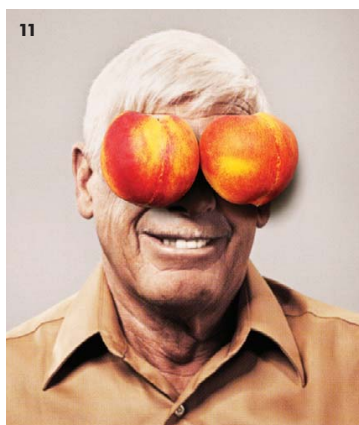
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The New York Times Magazine

January 14, 2018

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Behind the Cover Jake Silverstein, editor in chief: For this story we wanted a very straightforward and immediate cover. So we used a simple image and abandoned the typical conventions of display language — headline and subhead — for a more direct, conversational approach. Photograph by Natalie Keyssar for The New York Times.

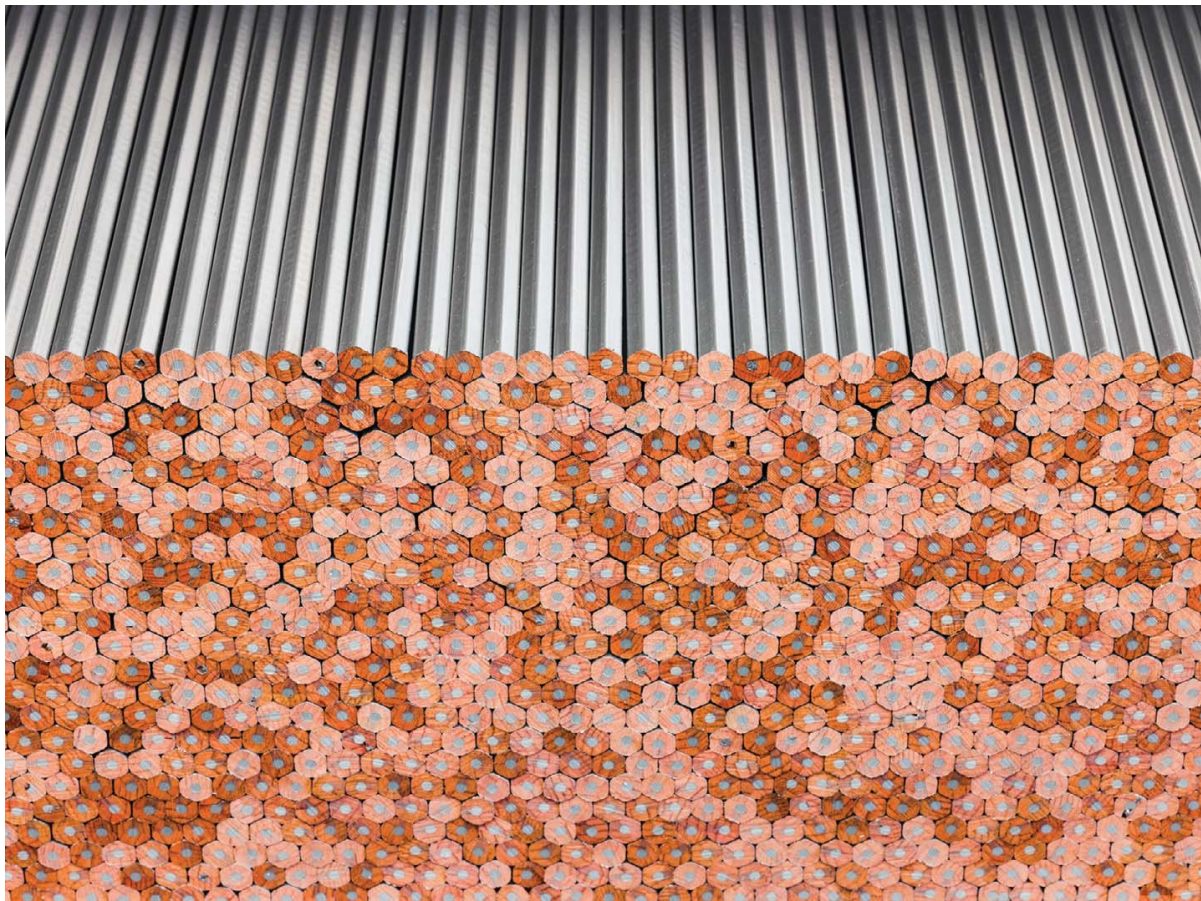
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Text by Sam Anderson</i> |
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'Pencils eschew digital jujitsu. They are pure analog, absolute presence. They help to rescue us from oblivion.'

PAGE 36

The General Pencil Company in Jersey City. Photograph by Christopher Payne.



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Photographed by Kathy Ryan at *The New York Times* on Dec. 21, 2017, at 9:59 a.m.

Jeneen Interlandi

"Why Are Our Most Important Teachers Paid the Least?" Page 30

Jeneen Interlandi is a health journalist at Consumer Reports, for which she covers the intersection of science, medicine and federal regulations. Her last article for the magazine examined the segregation of Roma students in Eastern Europe. This week she writes about the struggle to professionalize low-wage preschool teachers in the United States. She spent close to two years tracking the story's main character. "Kejo is a committed teacher with so much natural talent," Interlandi says. "But her daily personal struggles make professional advancement very difficult. We have this sense as a society that the early years are vitally important and that every child deserves the best possible start. But the value we accord preschool teachers is deeply incongruous with that ideal."

Sam Anderson

"Fine Lines,"
Page 36

Sam Anderson is a staff writer for the magazine who frequently writes the New Sentences column. His last feature was about the writer John McPhee.

Lauren Hilgers

"The World According to Guo,"
Page 26

Lauren Hilgers is a writer whose book "Patriot Number One" will be published in March. She last wrote for the magazine about Hong Kong's democratic revolution.

Christopher Payne

"Fine Lines,"
Page 36

Christopher Payne is a photographer who specializes in architecture and American industry. For the magazine, he most recently photographed a Tesla factory.

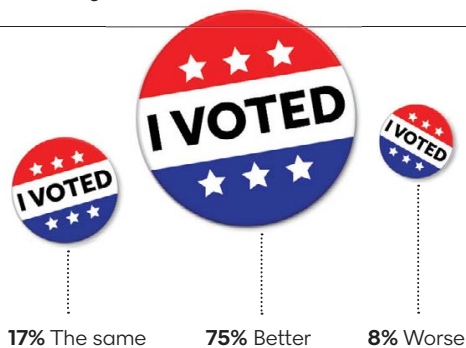
Soraya Roberts

First Words,
Page 11

Soraya Roberts is an essayist and cultural critic. She is the author of "In My Humble Opinion: My So-Called Life." This is her first article for the magazine.

Dear Reader: What If All Americans Voted?

Every week the magazine publishes the results of a study conducted online in June by The New York Times's research-and-analytics department, reflecting the opinions of 2,903 subscribers who chose to participate. This week's question: *Would the country be better or worse if every single American voted in every single election?*



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Readers respond to the 12.31.2017 issue.

RE: THE LIVES THEY LIVED

A collection of tributes to some of the artists, innovators and thinkers we lost in the past year.

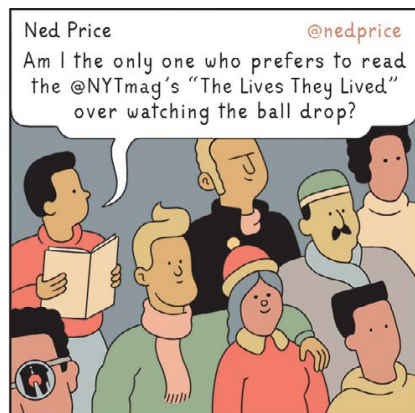
These lists can never cover everyone, so there are always going to be people miffed at who's left out. There was and will be no shortage of tributes to Tom Petty or Chris Cornell and other famous deceased. But DeMarlon Thomas? Tragic. S. Allen Counter? How amazing! I'm so happy to read about these people I didn't know about so I can learn about new things instead of reading even more about those we all already know.

Thank you for this excellent, diverse and thoughtful roundup. So many I didn't know but whose lives deserved to be recognized. And I for one like the choices of photographs — sometimes an item says more about a person than an actual portrait.

Regan Wood, Brooklyn

As a onetime patient of Dr. John Sarno, I'm a Sarno believer. Dr. Sarno was clearly onto something I doubt any physician would deny: A mind-body connection exists, and health status might be involved. But Sarno had his claws into it. When I saw him, his required therapy was appearance at a series of follow-up lectures. At the same time, I guess his success had eliminated some portion of the need for hospital surgery, prescription drugs, physical therapy. Might that be why he was isolated in the cafeteria? Now that he's not there, is that why his reputation is easily tarnished?

During my one-on-one with him, Dr. Sarno looked at my X-rays and told me



there were many people with similar X-rays who had no pain. He also definitely recommended surgery or another process whenever he thought X-rays or other tests called for it.

I was very surprised, but over time I opened up to the possibility that I could help myself. And I did: no pain for years and years.

It's disheartening to read that he couldn't take his own advice and find peace with his substantial contribution to physical medicine. Perhaps he saw the handwriting on the wall.

Mary Buchbinder, Suffern, N.Y.

I worked at the Fish Bowl, the store in Irvington, N.J., that was mentioned in the Herbert Axelrod article. Fish would be flown in from all over the world before there were distributors. A lot of important people passed through the Fish Bowl — ichthyologists, underwater photographers — and there was a lot of experimentation: They got discus fish and angelfish to breed! It was all touch and go. Many shipments from tropical countries were received frozen after sitting at the airport.

I remember meeting Axelrod at the time he was developing a strain of the fantail guppy. I didn't realize he was so notable: At the time, keeping tropical fish was so rare. Loved the article — it brought back memories. I'm glad this history I lived wasn't lost.

Richard Rudnickas, Boston

I assume there was some editorial debate about including Derek Walcott in this issue. Certainly, his life and literary accomplishments deserved consideration for inclusion.

However, in this era of #MeToo, It Stops Now and other important campaigns to



THE ISSUE, ON TWITTER

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stop violence against women, I would have expected from The Times a decision not to include Walcott in this group of honorable lives. It serves to further silence the voices and minimize the experiences of those women who were victims of unwanted sexual advances and harassment. Regardless of fame, position or achievement, zero tolerance means just that: zero tolerance.

Robert Cornett, Cape Elizabeth, Me.

Mary Tyler Moore as Mary Richards gave hope each week to many of us young women who were working at new careers in those days. She gave us a model for being single and career-oriented at a time when most families were disappointed in our unwillingness to marry right away, and when most men were disappointed in our unwillingness to abandon our ambitions.

To us, whether she intended it or not, Mary Tyler Moore will always be Mary Richards, our ray of hope in those difficult times.

Amy Bland, Hudson Valley, New York, on nytimes.com



CORRECTIONS

An article on Dec. 24 about Jordan Peele described incorrectly *"The Secret of NIMH."* It is an animated feature film, not a TV special.

An article on Dec. 24 about competition dance described incorrectly the relationship between the dancer Angel DiMartino Palladino and Dina Crupi, a dance-studio owner and teacher. While Crupi has seen Palladino perform at competitions, she was not Palladino's teacher.

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*We describe people as ‘**sexy**’ — along with food, gadgets, cars, ideas and anything else that can be desired and marketed. But whose desires is the market catering to? By Soraya Roberts*

Hot Property

Venus, the goddess of love, has taken many forms, but one dominates. The prehistoric Venus of Willendorf is round, but mostly at the breasts and hips. The Venus de Milo’s missing arms only make her curves more visible. Even the knee length tresses of Botticelli’s Venus fail to conceal her shape. Bounce forward 500 years, and the actress Uma Thurman poses nude, a towering hourglass, in the same oyster shell in “The Adventures of Baron Munchausen.” Some version of this form — white, voluptuous, exposed — is eternally present in our culture, on billboards, on screens, everywhere. This is “sexy,” or at least its usual shorthand. One designed, mainly, by and for straight white men: the fruit of the “male gaze” that the film theorist Laura Mulvey described in 1975, which “projects its fantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly.” ¶ People magazine’s Sexiest Man Alive has always been less beholden to the bold strokes of bodily divinity. Mel Gibson, Tom Cruise, Harrison Ford: It’s their faces that have occupied each cover, not their bodies. The most recent winner, the country musician

Blake Shelton, was an aw-shucks vision of the homespun white American male: plaid and beer and love handles, the kind of guy whose response to his win was “Y’all must be running out of people.” When his selection was announced in the fall, many women shared that perspective — and mobilized, offering “sexy” alternates in lighthearted protest. The issue wasn’t how Shelton looked so much as how he presented: as the Everyman, prized not in spite of his everyday appearance but because of it. (As *Entertainment Weekly*’s Dana Schwartz tweeted, “Blake Shelton is, at best, the sexiest divorced dad at this barbecue.”) The consensus replacements were the actors Idris Elba and Mahershala Ali, each more conventionally attractive, each also black. Other suggestions included Taika Waititi (sartorially exceptional, Maori) and Jeff Goldblum (charming, eccentric, 65 years old).

These women were laying their own claim to “sexy,” an adjective that — amid an endless stream of reports about sexual assault and harassment — has more often been wielded as a weapon. See, for instance, Roger Ailes, the former chairman of Fox News, reportedly telling Megyn Kelly that he wished to see her in the “very sexy bras” he assumed she possessed. For certain men, sexy means sex; it is not the human being, it is the human body. The women exuberantly rejecting Shelton were declaring: We are the subject, not the object. We’ll decide what’s “sexy.”

Originally, that which was “sexy” merely contained sex. The Oxford English Dictionary traces the word back to the British author Arnold Bennett and an 1896 letter about a work of art deemed too “seksy” to display. (Spelling aside, the word offered a much sleeker substitute for “sexful,” which appeared in print two years earlier.) Impregnating material with sexuality would soon prove itself a potent tool for advertisers. A landmark 1911 ad for Woodbury’s Facial Soap Company featured a man caressing a woman in a low-cut dress, with the tagline “A skin you love to touch.” Five years later, the ballerina Flores Revalles was front-page news after being photographed at the Bronx Zoo in a form-fitting gown with a snake coiled around her — her beauty, the story went, had tamed it.



The soap ad was conceived by the influential executive Helen Lansdowne; the snake stunt came from Edward Bernays, “the father of public relations,” who claimed in his 1928 book “Propaganda” that “human desires are the steam which makes the social machine work.” Having seen how images could be used for mass manipulation, Bernays proposed to maintain social order by sublimating individuals’ irrational impulses into capitalist consumption. Women’s desire to be autonomous, for instance, could be turned into a desire to buy smokes. “More women now do the same work as men do,” the psychoanalyst A.A. Brill told him. “Cigarettes, which are equated with men, become torches of freedom.”

And actual lust, it turned out, could be made almost indistinguishable from the lust for new products and new experiences. In 1950, the columnist Walter Winchell noted that producers

Women were laying their own claim to an adjective that has more often been wielded as a weapon.

of a show called “Fire Island, New York” worried their title “wouldn’t sound sexy enough.” It was one of the earliest cases of a slippage that has only grown, to the point where almost anything with a little extra oomph can be described as sexy — from a sexy new sports car to a sexy new legislative proposal. In the 1970s, a print ad for a Penril modem described the device as “versatile, dependable, compatible (maybe even sexy).” Because it’s hard to find the sensual side of a box, a woman in go-go boots served as a visual reminder. “Sexy,” more than anything, designates whatever we wish to acquire and consume, whether it’s an auto body or a human one.

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the first person identified as sexy was the silent film star Rudolph Valentino. His character the Sheik, based on an Edith Maude Hull fantasy, was marketed as “the greatest lover that ever lived” — an exotic

dandy with the passion to ravish even a white aristocrat. Valentino occupied an ambiguous space, with his masculinity, sexuality and race all intriguingly fluid. The layman could not keep up. In 1922, the cartoonist Dick Dorgan made fun of Valentino's superiority in a Photoplay editorial: "I hate him because he's too good looking," he wrote. "The women are all dizzy over him."

By the middle of the century, "sexy" had landed on stars like Marilyn Monroe. It was feminine, one-dimensional and not at all ambiguous — the woman as Venus. Valentino's image was more powerful for his silence; Monroe's was the opposite, boosted by her dumb-blonde act and baby-doll voice. Who better to appear on the first cover of Playboy, the official Entertainment for Men? "She was the fifties' fiction," wrote the film critic Molly Haskell in 1974 — "the lie that a woman has no sexual needs, that she is there to cater to, or enhance, a man's needs."

This was not how women saw themselves. "What is a sexy woman?" Helen Gurley Brown asked in "Sex and the Single Girl" in 1962. "Very simple. She is a woman who enjoys sex." When Brown became the editor of Cosmopolitan, she delivered sex to women the same way Playboy did to men, with characteristic cover lines like "What's Most Sexy About Men" and "Are You Sexy?" This was meant as an empowering alternative to the images found elsewhere, but its rapprochement of women and sex also wound up transforming both into one commodity. Sexy women were for sale: Women with enough money could be them, and men with enough money could have them. You, too, could be a modern woman, but only if you put in the man hours between the sheets. Even in the hands of women, "sexy" was still wrapped in the embrace of the market.

In 1972, *Cosmopolitan* presented its first male centerfold: a furry Burt Reynolds, reclining nude on an equally furry rug. And yet "sexy" would continue, in the main, to be defined by the male gaze, filtered through a consumer market dominated by men, most of them white. Its images were predictable; its attainment directly proportional to buying power and never fully achieved. "Ads do not sell sex — that would be counterproductive, if it meant that heterosexual

women and men turned to one another and were gratified," Naomi Wolf wrote in "The Beauty Myth" in 1990. "What they sell is sexual discontent."

The market trades particularly on women's dissatisfaction with themselves, reducing them to objects of allure that can always be improved with the purchase of a new lipstick. A sexy woman thus becomes bait — a line of thinking that, among this fall's stories of predation, prompted several remarkable opinions. The designer Donna Karan wondered: "Are we asking for it by presenting all the sensuality and sexuality?" When the market holds both that women should aspire to be sexy and that a sexy woman equals sex, the moment a woman chafes at sexual attention is seen, to some, as a problem of her own making.

Sexy women were for sale: Women with enough money could be them, and men with enough money could have them.

After more than 120 years of use, "sexy" resists overnight reconstruction. We may try to chip away at Venus's stone curves, but the transformation is slow and complex. Women can lay their claim to it — Gurley Brown, Lansdowne, swooning Valentino fans — but a tradition of objectification persists. The women cheerily replacing Blake Shelton were reframing sexiness, but only very slightly; their choices still adhered to an obstinate commercial ideal. We can imagine deifying different bodies or a wider variety of them; we might even imagine a post-gaze society, where we lust after personality and spirit rather than external appearance. But all of this would require reimagining centuries of culture — and reconfiguring the billions of dollars of powerful market forces built atop them. ♦

New Sentences By Nitsuh Abebe



'I hope you will understand that back there we were talking about the drama of good and evil, and about how, sad to say, there was no communication between the two, and how a single decisive detail in the world is, sad to say, enough to make the whole world intolerable.'

From "Universal Theseus," a story in the new collection "The World Goes On" (New Directions, 2017), by the Hungarian writer Laszlo Krasznahorkai. The collection was translated by George Szirtes, Otilie Mulzet and John Batki.

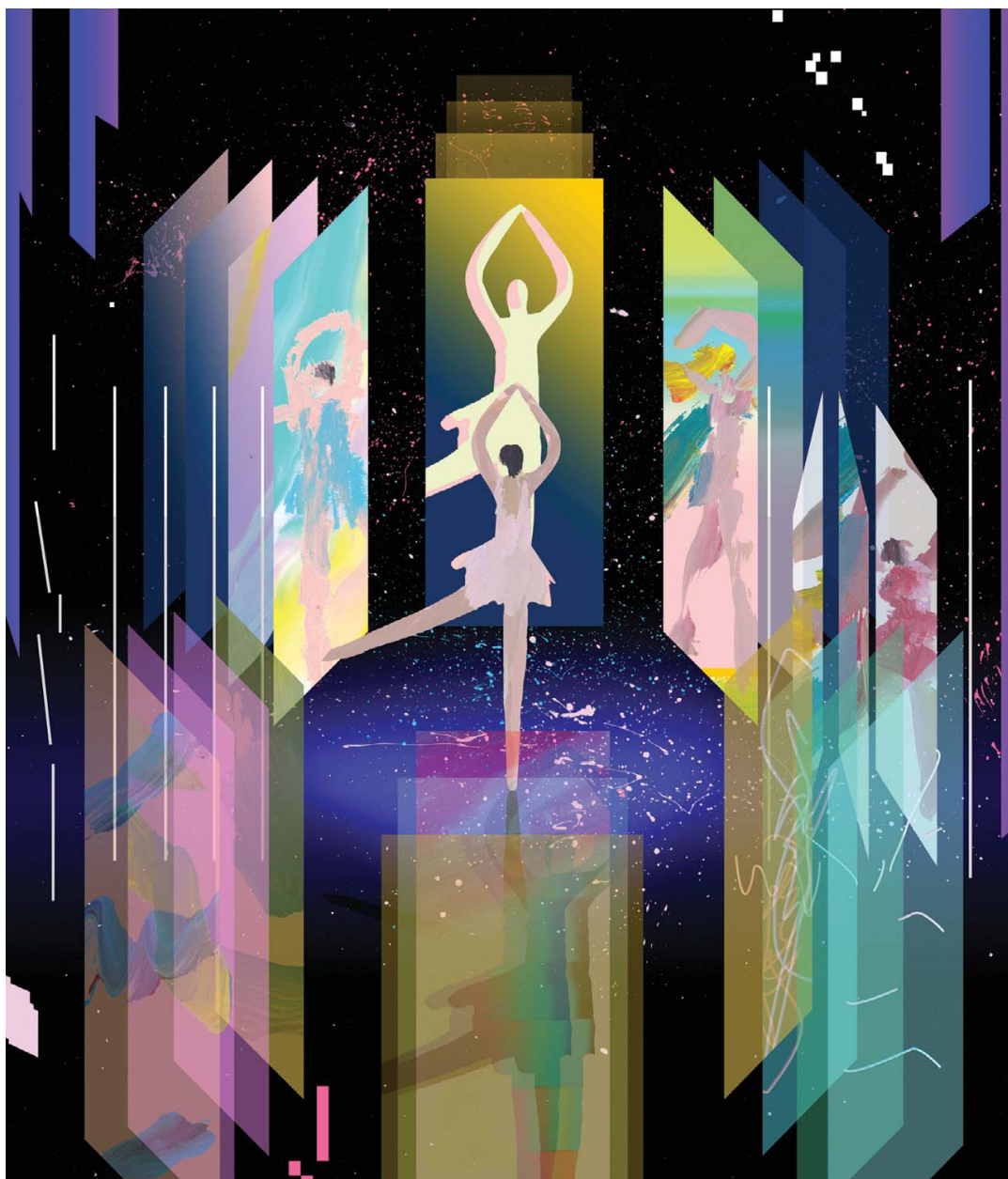
The Hungarian writer Laszlo Krasznahorkai does many fascinating things with his prose, and one of the most striking is the thing you see above: Starting a sentence hopefully, trying to say this or that, and then traveling inexorably, one clause after another, to the bleak and totalizing conclusion that all is lost, nothing is real, the world is intolerable.

Like Beckett, it's *much* funnier than you'd think. It's as though there's a black hole hiding behind the pages: No matter how innocently a sentence begins, no matter how elliptical its orbit, the laws of gravity will inevitably pull it back into the void. It will end where it was always fated to end, where *everything* is fated to end, in a pointless vacuum.

The speaker of the sentence here is being forced to give a series of lectures to a mysterious audience. In one he describes self-pity: "No one is harming you, you are fine, you sit in silence, alone in a desolate park after the rain, or in a cozy room abroad, before dawn or as darkness falls, and this self-pity ambushes and takes you by the rudest surprise, devouring and inevitable, because this is when you realize, without understanding it, that nothing exists."

It really should not be surprising, with this author, that a sentence might begin with a person sitting calmly and end with nothing existing at all. But it *is* surprising, every time — plus oddly satisfying. The void arrives with the tidy logic of a punch line: You reach it, and you realize there was no place else you could ever have been headed.

Algorithmic surveillance has put humanity in touch with a new sort of omniscience — the kind we can fool.



In a series of studies published in 2012, two psychologists, Ara Norenzayan and Will Gervais, set out to test a simple question: When people think about God, do they feel or act as if they are being monitored? Subjects of varying religiosity were primed to think about God, then asked to complete self-evaluations based on statements like “I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me” and “No matter whom I’m talking to, I’m always a good listener.” Results, researchers said, were consistent with what they call the “supernatural-monitoring hypothesis” — that is, that “thinking of God triggers the same social cognitive processes that are activated by real-time social surveillance.” A sense that you’re being seen — whether by a fellow human or by a supreme consciousness from which no thought can be withheld — does seem to change how you see yourself as well as how you behave.

Since 2012, online platforms have moved to the center of hundreds of millions more lives, popularizing their particular brands of social surveillance. Services like Facebook and Twitter and Instagram are inextricably tied to the experience of being monitored by others, which, if it doesn’t always produce “prosocial” behavior in the broad psychological sense, seems to have encouraged behaviors useful to the platforms themselves — activity and growth. These businesses serve many different purposes, but the one thing they have in common is that they have figured out new ways to monetize the powerful twin sensations of seeing and being seen by others.

But alongside this exhilarating, debilitating, empowering and terrifying human spectacle, these sites have also fostered — inadvertently — a new but not entirely unfamiliar feeling, that of being watched from above. There is little about the ruthless, marketlike social-media experience that primes you to think about any sort of god. But there are, I’ve noticed, persistent and ever-more-obvious experiences that remind you of another kind of higher power: the automated systems on which these platforms run.

Services that used to depend on asking me questions — What do you like? Whom do you want to follow? — have started making more assumptions based on my behavior. I’m reminded that my actions are being recorded and factored into my experience when I am greeted on Twitter by a series of recommendations derived,



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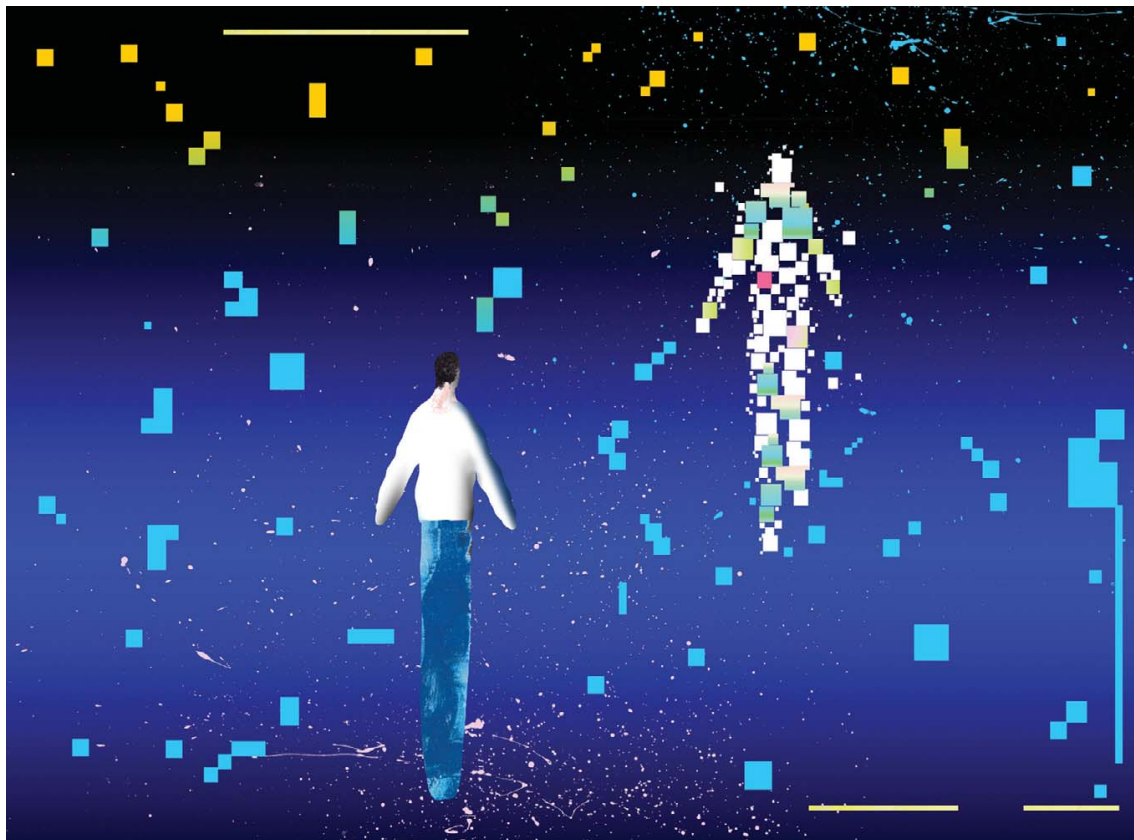
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apparently, from things I've liked, looked at or reposted. I'm implicitly prompted to think about algorithmic surveillance when, the day after I wasted a few minutes scrolling through a cycling publication's account, my Instagram app floods my Explore tab with photos of mountain bikes. Weeks after tapping an unfamiliar name on Facebook and scrolling through the recent posts — a postmarriage surname change, a new profile photo — this person, a former acquaintance I haven't spoken to in years, is given the same feed placement as current close friends.

These experiences manifest beyond social networks as well. Searches for holiday gifts haunt web browsing, as Amazon "retargeting" ads place the products I looked at, briefly — a thermos, headphones, binoculars — next to, above and in the middle of news articles. They find

their way back over the walls too, placing reminders of my recorded behavior in my Instagram feed — ads that say, "We'd like you to buy running gear," not quite so loudly as they say, "We've got eyes everywhere."

Of course, this is the deal we have entered into with such services: our data for their products. That this surveillance is happening is obvious, even if the ways we're reminded of it can still be jarring. Spotify, the music-streaming service, recently began an ad campaign that mined and cheekily broadcast actual individual listening habits: "Dear person who played 'Sorry' 42 times on Valentine's Day: What did you do?"; "To the person in NoLiTa who started listening to holiday music way back in June: You really jingle *all* the way, huh?" The company was boldly showing off its intimate knowledge of current users in an effort to gain new

ones — a harmlessly creepy example of a strategy that could easily backfire.

Lately I've been wondering if a growing awareness of this peculiar arrangement might have secondary consequences. Maybe knowing that we're being monitored by judgmental algorithms could affect our behavior, too. If this is the case — if awareness of mechanical all-seeing eyes changes how we see and comport ourselves — then, well, *how?* I started thinking about a version of this question a few months ago, recording small instances where I could. What I ended up with was a list not of behavioral improvements or of flashes of self-aware accountability but of tiny, neurotic evasions.

For example, I thought better of searching for a friend with whom I had lost touch, knowing that his posts would

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then climb the ladder of my Facebook feed, turning a flash of guilt into a persistent reminder of my failure. For work, I sometimes need to watch videos made by a range of toxic, hateful or just unappealing vloggers, and I found that I'd avoid watching them on my phone, waiting instead until I could get to my laptop, where I could more quickly and totally log out, go incognito and avoid filling my future YouTube recommendations with bile. During the holidays, I shopped in anonymous tabs, assuming that gifts could be revealed during an idle Instagram scroll on the couch.

As with performing on social media for friends, family or co-workers — posting your best pictures, documenting your most exciting activities or professionally marketing yourself — these individually tiny elisions weren't entirely honest. But unlike these social displays, they were first and foremost intentionally deceptive, and they were rooted in antagonism.

Believers in an omniscient God tend to assume that nothing can truly be hidden, including doubt. Pascal's Wager, for example, which supposes that believing in God is simply a safer bet against even vanishingly narrow odds of eternal damnation, leans on a potentially fatal premise: Surely any conceivable God would know you're just making a bet? But we ascribe no such powers to algorithms. Machine surveillance can be fooled in small ways and big ones: by the creation of blacked-out spaces, the introduction of strategically tainted data and the performance of a particular version of the self.

Social platforms also expect faith from their users: that data will be used responsibly, that at least some forms of privacy among people will be respected. But the flashing reminders of the automatic surveillance on which they are increasingly built can undermine those expectations and remind us instead of our ability to withdraw. Residents in neighborhoods that have been flooded by drivers following directions from Waze — which is owned by Google and supplies data to for Google Maps — have resorted to filing false accident reports to divert drivers. Waze has sought to curb these reports, but in so doing, it has come across less as omniscient than unthinking and defensive — and above all, corporate. Knowing that our maps were watching us produced

Knowing that our maps were watching us produced individual acts of defiance that amounted to collective acts of resistance.

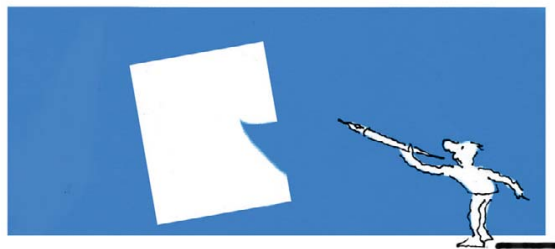
individual acts of defiance that amounted to collective acts of resistance.

Increased awareness of automated surveillance, in other words, is most effective at demystifying the systems doing the watching, not reifying their wisdom and authority. It clarifies our relationships with them: each recommendation or subtle change reminds us not only that we're

being watched, but also that we've consented to it. And such awareness will also be a necessity should one or all of these platforms — through more brazen exploitation, calamitous hacking or even greater sharing with governments — cause us to well and truly lose faith. They may aspire to divine levels of omniscience, but they risk driving away their followers in the process. ♦

Poem Selected by Terrance Hayes

The ars poetica, a poem about poetry, is as old as the Roman poet Horace, but the form remains nearly impossible to define. You could argue that every poem is an ars poetica; every poem is about poetry. "Sometimes" makes even the process that leads to writing a mystifying act of poetry: part ritual, part gamble, part caper, wherein even the paper is part of the poem. "Each does what he can to make this process more difficult, and why not?"



Sometimes,

By Mark Irwin

I'll crumple the paper before beginning to write on it, or sometimes I'll spray my notebook with water, then sit in the sun, jabbing at the muggy pages with a pencil. Each does what he can to make this process more difficult, and why not? The white paper's selfish, wanting only more space and silence, inviting words as one might houses to an Alaskan glacier, or inviting emotions as one might guests to a wedding, each of them blindfolded, feeling their way into the chapel to listen, then toward the buffet to eat. And sometimes I'll write on black paper — the letters glinting, barely detectable, deterring my desire to change things — then tilt the paper at noon to read it. And sometimes I'll toss the empty pages into the fire at dusk and speak to them as one would to a child, or a ghost ruining the sky, then only what I wake to in the old morning will I remember.

Terrance Hayes is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently "How to Be Drawn," which was a finalist for the National Book Award in 2015. His fourth collection, "Lighthouse," won the 2010 National Book Award. **Mark Irwin** is a professor in the Ph.D. in creative writing and literature program at the University of Southern California. He is the author of nine poetry collections, including, most recently, "A Passion According to Green," published by New Issues Poetry & Prose.



Should I Accept a Cash Reward for Doing the Right Thing?

My 12-year-old son and I found a cellphone in the back seat of a taxi. I called someone on the owner's contact list who called him who then called me. We met on a convenient corner, and I gave him the phone. He was very appreciative and wanted to give us \$40 to express his thanks. My son started to take it. I said: "Thank you, but no thank you. We didn't do this for a reward." Trying to explain integrity to my son, however, has been very difficult. He doesn't see why we didn't take money for a good deed. Even some of my friends said I should have taken the "reward." What do you think?

Name Withheld

I understand your concern. We should be cautious about extracting market value from moral values. Imagine if we rewarded heroism in battle not with medals but with a cash prize. In his book "The Moral Economy," Samuel Bowles, who directs the behavioral-sciences program at the Santa Fe Institute, argues that appeals to self-interest can undermine moral motivations.

But let's distinguish two issues here. One is why you should do the sort of generous thing you and your son did. The answer is, as you suggest, that good deeds are their own reward. And it *was* a good deed: You weren't obliged to take the trouble to get the phone back to its owner yourself. You could have given it to the taxi driver, who has a professional

duty either to arrange the return of lost property or to drop it off at a police station or with the owner of the cab. So what you did went above and beyond the call of duty. It was, to use a philosopher's sesquipedalian word, an act of supererogation.

Had the phone's owner just expressed his thanks, you would have had the satisfaction that decent people get from their decent acts. More than this, a world of decent people like you is a better world. Moments like these connect us to strangers in a way that reflects our common humanity. So we should honor these decent acts in others. I agree with you about all of that.

But — here's the second issue — this doesn't mean that we must reject every offer of a reward. One way to honor a kind act, if you're the beneficiary, is to express gratitude, as this man did. His offer of money was presumably meant as a further expression of that gratitude. And it didn't automatically turn your act into a grubby commercial arrangement. Not every gift corrodes moral sentiment.

Money talks, not just in the unpleasant sense that you can buy compliance but also in the sense that in giving you something of value, I can show that I respect what you have done. A generous act; the offer of a token of appreciation; the grateful acceptance. Each of these can continue a small moment of human connection.

Sometimes people feel that to be the beneficiary of a generous act puts them under an obligation, in a way that makes them uncomfortable. Did the man want to reduce his own sense of being in your

debt? Were you worried that he thought of you as the kind of person who was motivated only by the desire for a reward? The fact that it's natural to wonder about these questions reflects the truth that small offers of money like these are attempts at communication — and, like all attempts at communication, can sometimes fail.

An acquaintance of mine was recently diagnosed with an incurable cancer. He has health insurance but decided to spend his small retirement savings in a nontraditional medical clinic in Mexico. He was prescribed vitamins and other homeopathic treatments for a sizable sum. As he is now unable to pay his living expenses, he has started raising money online. I am a health care provider and realize the importance of combining traditional and nontraditional medicine. I disagree, however, with his departure from science-based treatment and advice. What duty do I have to help him financially?

Name Withheld

When you are confronting death, it's hard to think carefully about the decisions you face. That's why it's particularly impressive when people do so with intelligence and resolution. As long as you are mentally competent, though, these decisions are yours to make. What you can't expect is that other people will pay for you to follow your choices.

This patient is, you say, an acquaintance. Paying anything at all for the medical expenses of an acquaintance is



Bonus Advice From Judge John Hodgman

Kate writes: I have been asking my boyfriend, Brian, for a fun, fancy birthday cake for 10 years. I've relaxed the definition over time to include prefab cakes, like Carvel's Cookie Puss. But he has never done it. I'm turning 40. Please order Brian to provide a custom-made fun, fancy cake.

Until "Cookie Puss," I was beginning to worry you were using "fun, fancy" as a euphemism for "erotic." Do people still buy those? In Essex Street Market there used to be a pastry stall that had a model cake on display with an orgy on top: nude revelers barely concealed by a blanket of fondant. It collected dust for years, but my revulsion remained fresh. Anyway, yes: Brian is a monster. He must order you a custom fun, fancy cake at *punishing* expense for your 40th. (Unless Cookie Puss is erotic to you. Then I don't know what to say.)

To submit a query: Send an email to ethicist@nytimes.com; or send mail to The Ethicist, The New York Times Magazine, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018. (Include a daytime phone number.)

doing more than you must. It's an act of supererogation, again. If you do it, it will be because you care about and respect him. And if you respect him, you will want him to act on the basis of a proper understanding of his situation. Respecting people entails telling them when we think they're wrong — at least when the issue is ethically significant, and when we think they're capable of understanding the truth. That you would give people money if they were making sensible choices doesn't mean that you're ignoring their right to manage their own affairs when you decline to underwrite foolish ones.

As a medical professional, you have come to the view that this costly Mexican clinic is offering this man no medical benefit. You also know that good medical treatment, even when it can't cure a condition, can often provide patients a longer "quality adjusted" life. If the clinic's nostrums are useless, he's going to find that he's continuing to decline. In giving him money, you will be subsidizing peddlers of false hope (whether mercenary or deluded) and enabling your acquaintance to put off important end-of-life decisions. The respectful thing, if you know him well enough, is to help him face the truth.

While in the process of purchasing a home, I discovered that concrete for its foundation was supplied by a company whose product has crumbled in tens of thousands of homes in my state. Most homeowners have been ruined, as there is no relief from insurance or FEMA and little to no relief from the state. I did not buy the house, but I worry for the next buyer. What should I do with this information?

Name Withheld

This sounds like something that a prospective buyer should bear in mind, but you can't be obliged to stand in front of the property with a warning sign. You can, however, formally notify the current owners and their real estate broker of what you've found. It's up to them to do the right thing. At the very least, a formal communication from you will put them on notice that, in the event of future litigation, they can't safely claim ignorance. ♦

Kwame Anthony Appiah teaches philosophy at N.Y.U. He is the author of "Cosmopolitanism" and "The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen."



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Learned League

By Hannah Goldfield



The last time I went to trivia night at a bar, the friend who invited me set expectations unreasonably high. He announced proudly to our teammates, most of whom I'd never met, that I worked as a fact-checker for a magazine, the implication being that I was a repository of data. As it happened, my performance was sub-par — until we arrived at the clincher, a double-or-nothing bonus round. “Why did a porn-production studio offer a British woman \$1 million to appear in one of their films?” I bolted to attention. I had

read about said British woman that very afternoon, while browsing *The Daily Mail* instead of attending to my fact-checking duties! “She had two vaginas,” I whispered excitedly. When we won, my friend’s friends — now, dare I say, my own — cheered with gusto.

The truth about being a fact-checker is that you’re not supposed to rely on what you know. That’s usually where the mistakes are made — in assumptions, in guesses based on faded memories and self-affirming bluster. A good

Life doesn’t present us with many opportunities to put to use the facts that we know for no other reason than that we know them.

fact-checker is incredibly stringent and willing to look something up, and then look it up again, and then call someone to confirm that they’ve looked it up correctly, and someone else to confirm that they’ve understood it. Being adept at this process is its own skill, and I consider it one of mine. But when it comes to intellectual capital, what I’m most impressed by — in myself and in other people — are the random bits of information we manage to retain and retrieve from our own crowded brains, evidence of lives spent

reading, watching, listening and discussing. Proof that we've been curious, awake and observant, and that we're richer and more complicated for it.

Life doesn't present us with many opportunities to put to use the facts that we know for no other reason than that we know them. And so last year, when two of my smartest, most interesting, most encyclopedic friends revealed that they were members of an online trivia league, I wanted in. No, it was not HQ, the live-video, cash-prize trivia app that has taken the internet by storm in the last few months.

My friends' trivia league, which is now my own, is called Learned League. It predates HQ by about 18 years, and you can tell — visiting the desktop-only, confusing-to-navigate website on which it lives is a little like time-traveling to Y2K. Text is small and dense; there are no graphics beyond a generic-looking logo and the tiny flags that players are required to use as avatars. More important, there's basically nothing at stake: There are no prizes of any kind, and when you join (by referral only, for a yearly fee of \$30), you're placed into a group of about 20 random competitors, identified by only their last names and first initials, so you can't even really play against your friends — although everyone, across every "rundle," as the groups are called, answers the same six questions each day of each 25-day quarterly season, and anyone is free to look up anyone else's statistics.

The only thing stopping you from cheating is the honor code, but there's no point in cheating, because the only point of Learned League is to test your own knowledge. And test your knowledge it does: Most of the questions — written by the league's trivia-obsessed founder, Shayne Bushfield, who in his capacity as "commissioner" uses the moniker "Thorsten A. Integrity" — are extremely challenging and often bewilderingly worded. "Identify the subatomic particle of the baryon family, believed to be composed of two up quarks and one down quark, which has a mass of 1.672×10^{-24} grams and a positive electric charge of 1.602×10^{-19} coulombs" or "What was the name given to the ecclesiastical court established by the Roman Catholic Church, beginning with Pope Gregory IX in 1231, whose jurisdiction was the prosecution of heresy?"

Trivia becomes motivation to pay closer attention to everything, just in case.

I didn't know the answers to either of those questions, and I can't remember them now. I am very, very bad at Learned League, consistently finishing seasons in the bottom quarter of my rundle. But every so often, I get one right, and the feeling is nothing short of euphoric. One about a short-lived television show that happens to have been created and written by a friend of mine and her husband. One about maple syrup, in which I happen to be something of an expert. One about "The Decameron," by Boccaccio, which I was required to read in college and hadn't thought of since. Sometimes it feels like pure magic: On a day I had idly studied my map-of-the-night-sky shower curtain while brushing my teeth, I was stunned to find that one of Thorsten's questions was, "Betelgeuse, Rigel and Bellatrix are

the Alpha, Beta and Gamma stars of what constellation?" (Answer: Orion.) Trivia becomes motivation to pay closer attention to everything, just in case.

And when I get them wrong, I revel in debriefing with friends who play, over email or text. We complain about Thorsten's pedantic verbosity, or compete for who came up with the most ludicrous guesses. There are message boards for this same purpose on the site, which, combined with its old-school design, make it feel like one of the last corners of the World Wide Web that makes good on its early promises: connection, community, shared knowledge. And besides, didn't Socrates say, "The only thing I know is that I know nothing"? He didn't. I know because I was once a fact-checker, and I looked it up. ♦

Tip By Malia Wollan

How to Build a Ship In a Bottle



"Start with the right bottle," says Greg Alvey, a builder and restorer of ships in bottles who has owned some 800 since he started collecting them in the late 1990s. You want clear glass without visible seams, flaws or raised lettering. The classic version is the Haig Dimple whisky bottle, with its short neck and flattened sides. "It can't roll away," Alvey says.

Beginners should consider constructing what's known as a waterline ship, which sits atop a sea usually made of modeling clay or plumber's putty, thereby saving you from having to make a full hull that needs to fit through the opening. For dimensions, find a plan online or in a book. Alvey suggests a schooner whose sails will seem impossibly tall inside the

bottle. The point of this type of folk art is to evoke a sense of bewilderment in the viewer. "It's a puzzle," Alvey says. "How is it possible to get that in there?"

Shape a hull from soft basswood. Using toothpicks or wooden sticks from cotton swabs, make masts, booms and the spar extending from the vessel's front prow, which is called the bowsprit. Attach your masts to the hull with a piece of wire that will serve as a hinge. Glue the sails (made from tea- or coffee-soaked paper for a seaworn-canvas look), the masts and booms and rig them all with strings that go through the bowsprit. Place a few drops of glue atop the putty sea inside your bottle. Loosen your rigging lines and bring the sails and masts down alongside the hull. Insert the boat into the bottle stern first, using a bent metal coat hanger or a surgeon's tool called polypus forceps. Hoist the sails up by pulling your strings. Glue them to the bowsprit. Let the glue dry for a few days. Cork your bottle.

Some people refer to curious miniatures like these as "patience bottles," but Alvey says the virtue doesn't need to come naturally — "You can learn patience doing this." Beginners should expect a level of exasperation when trying to drill holes in toothpicks or whittle miniature anchors. "When things start going wrong," says Alvey, who once put a project aside for seven years, "it's usually best just to walk away and come back when you've calmed down." ♦

Hannah Goldfield
is a writer who
lives in New York.

A Friend's Comfort Food

Tofu and quinoa can be just as good for the soul as chicken soup.



The meal is just healthful enough to justify a little self-righteousness.



At least once a week, I arrive home from the office I share with a dozen other writers and, overwhelmed with hunger, immediately begin to cook. I pull out my scratched enamelware pot. I measure in rice, quinoa and water with a generous pinch of salt and set it on the stove to cook. I take a block of medium-firm tofu from its package, pat it dry, slice it into pieces and drizzle it with Bragg's liquid aminos, soy sauce's unfermented hippie cousin. Then I rummage through the crisper for leafy greens or broccoli — whatever I can find — and trim away the woody bits. I fry the tofu in coconut oil, boil the vegetables, cut some herbs from the garden box and serve myself dinner in my favorite shallow bowl with a healthy smear of chile paste.

The entire process takes about 40 minutes. The meal is just healthful enough to justify a little self-righteousness. And though the curious trio of tofu, Bragg's and coconut oil eventually transform to bear savory, custardy bites, this dish is about more than just tastes and textures. I grew up thinking of tofu as bland, rubbery filler food, but steeped in aminos, the semisoft tofu melts away with each bite, leaving behind a steamy, satisfying contrail of salt and umami. The coconut oil lends a trace of its sweet, tropical aroma as it yields a crisp, lacy crust. Mixed with quinoa, the rice becomes nutty and complex, a chewy counterpoint to the tender tofu. With only a few steps and five main ingredients, the dish barely requires a recipe, but the relish with which I eat it, the way I look forward to and relax into that steamy bowl, make me feel a way only a handful of dishes have over the course of my life. In the last few years, this funny, nourishing, simple meal has somehow become my preferred comfort food.

By definition, comfort foods are rich and creamy, or evocative of childhood pleasures. But this dish contains no butter, cheese or chicken stock, the pillars atop which classic comfort foods are built. Quinoa and tofu don't stoke a nostalgic flame — or even an ancestral one — for me. But this meal reflects a pair of friendships so nourishing that they've enveloped me in the sisterhood I've always sought. While I grew up in suburban Southern California in the 1980s, my friends Mara and Twilight Greenaway were scampering up avocado trees and pulling weeds on a little farm atop a mound of cooled lava half an ocean away, in Hawaii. When we all ended up in the Bay

Area 20-some years later, I was working in a restaurant with Mara's best friend while Twilight wrote about food and farming. Our lives were bound to intersect, and they did, around the table.

At first, I was the one cooking for them. But several years ago, the restaurant I ran closed, and I shifted away from professional cooking. Just as I lost my steady source of income and health insurance, I injured my knee and fell into a devastating depression. I couldn't cook for myself, let alone anyone else, so Twilight and Mara began to cook for me. Whenever I could muster the energy, I'd visit one or the other, sit at her table and let her sheathe me in friendship.

At first, apologies accompanied every meal. The sisters worried constantly that the simple dishes they served me — sautéed greens, roast chicken, pots of beans — weren't impressive enough to serve a chef. But the value of eating at a friend's table is found around it, not on it. I'll eat anything, even foods I've always shunned, when a friend cooks it. And besides, they're both great cooks. So when one afternoon Twilight asked if I wanted a snack and then made me a pot of mixed grains when I answered yes, I ate it with gusto — even though I'd always held an inexplicable grudge against quinoa.

And one evening, sensing that I was slipping into a bleak abyss, Mara invited me to stay for dinner. She was “just making tofu,” but from a stool at the kitchen counter, I watched her let the soft pieces brown and release from the pan before she gingerly flipped each one. Little tricks like this make all the difference in flavor — rush the flip, and you'll tear the soft tofu and miss out on that golden brown crust. Having long been a champion of practice in the kitchen, I was delighted by her obvious familiarity with that delicate ingredient. When I asked her for the complete recipe, she recited it in two sentences: “Marinate tofu in Bragg's. Fry it in coconut oil.”

“Tofu was definitely a comfort food,” Mara told me with a smile and a shrug. “Our mother would get us baked teriyaki tofu from the health food store as a special treat. Now, whenever I go back to Hawaii, I have to eat several pieces.”

After Mara moved to the mainland, she missed that snack and tried baking it for years, but it was always too dry. So the dish migrated out of the oven and onto the stove. “And Twilight taught me to fry in coconut oil. It gets hotter, so the tofu gets crispier.”

The constant exchange of care, memory, flavor and experience throughout my friendship with these sisters has been an unwavering source of comfort. So even though my genuine love of tofu and quinoa now surprises no one more than me, it also makes complete sense: When I mimic their cooking, Twilight and Mara are in the kitchen with me. I pull up seats at my table for them. And even when I'm eating by myself, I'm not alone.

Mara's Tofu With Mixed Grains

Time: 45 minutes

- 1 1/3 cups Thai jasmine rice
- 3/4 cup quinoa
- 3 cups water
- 3/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 14-ounce blocks medium-firm tofu
- 6 tablespoons Bragg's liquid aminos
- 4-6 tablespoons coconut oil
- Cilantro leaves for garnish

1. Rinse and drain rice and quinoa. Cook in a rice cooker with water and salt, or in a heavy-bottomed 2-quart saucepot over medium heat. Cover, and bring to a boil, then reduce to a faint simmer. Cook for 35-40 minutes, or until all water has been absorbed.

2. Line a baking sheet or large plate with paper towels. Set aside.

3. Pat tofu blocks dry, then halve lengthwise. Cut into 1/2-inch-thick slices. Drizzle 2 tablespoons aminos onto the bottom of a large, shallow glass or ceramic dish, then lay a layer of tofu in it. Drizzle with another 2 tablespoons of aminos, then layer in remaining tofu, and drizzle with remaining aminos. Marinate for 5 minutes, then rotate and flip tofu slices, and tilt dish to coat evenly. Marinate 5 more minutes. Drain away excess aminos.

4. Set a 10-inch cast-iron or nonstick pan over high heat. When the pan is hot, add 2 tablespoons coconut oil. Just as oil begins to smoke, carefully lay in pieces of tofu in a single layer, leaving room between each piece.

5. Reduce heat to medium high, do not touch the tofu and cook 6-7 minutes per side until golden brown. Use a thin metal spatula to carefully flip the pieces. Cook the rest the same way, adding more oil as needed.

6. Remove cooked tofu to prepared baking sheet, and allow to drain.

7. Use a fork to fluff rice and quinoa. Serve tofu with rice. Garnish with cilantro leaves.

Serves 4. ♦

Off the Top of Your Head

Using intuition to make rice pudding can bring delicious surprises.

Our son was still only crawling when Marie-Cécile, a young Frenchwoman, became his babysitter. That she stayed with us for years explains why he has a near-perfect French accent and why I know the lyrics and accompanying hand motions to nursery songs from the 1960s. It's also why I know the expression *au pif*.

The first time I heard the words (pronounced “oh peef”) was when I asked Marie-Cécile how she made the rice pudding that was cooling on the counter. “*Au pif*,” she said, bouncing her index finger off the tip of her nose as though she were playing charades. Encouraged to give a definition, she shrugged her shoulders and shook her head slowly.

As a noun, *pif* is slang for nose, and *au pif* can mean randomly, roughly or off the top of your head. Having cooked with Marie-Cécile a few times before then, I should have guessed that it had something to do with feeling your way around a dish. Marie-Cécile never turned to a recipe, not even to check a measurement, a step or a tip. She cooked simple, satisfying food, calmly and assuredly, partly from memories of things 3,600 miles away and partly from good kitchen sense.

Although it sounds most adorable in French, *au pif* is the way people everywhere cook. A dash of this. A bit of that. We toss broccoli into the pasta because we find some in the corner of the vegetable bin. We put the stew to braise in the oven when the stovetop is full; open the spice drawer, see star anise and flavor a stir-fry with it. We cook with what we have on hand, making changes to recipes as we go along. Sometimes cooking *au pif* is creative; sometimes it's practical; and most of the time we don't even think about it. It's just how we move about the



Marie-Cécile never turned to a recipe, not even to check a measurement, a step or a tip.



kitchen. It's how we put together a meal — until we get to dessert, which so often involves more precision than inspiration.

Marie-Cécile's desserts were never exact, formal or fussy. Those she returned to often — poached fruit; baked apples; a thick, sweet pancake; and a memorable rice pudding — were made in the spirit of *au pif*. I thought of them as this-and-that sweets: A little more of this or a little less of that, and they would still be fine. If precision were important and if recipes were required, Marie-Cécile, like so many good cooks faced with flour, sugar, butter and measuring cups, was timid.

When I knew her, I was timid, too. I was just learning to bake and hadn't yet discovered that within the bounds of a recipe, a baker with an imagination could find room to play.

Baking is a craft built on proportions (fat to flour, wet ingredients to dry, mass to leavening), metamorphosis (beating butter and sugar together until creamy, egg whites until firm, dough until it comes together in a ball) and observation (bake until the cupcakes are springy to the touch, the cake starts to pull away from the sides of the pan, the custard no longer jiggles). It took me a long while to see that everything I needed to succeed was written into each recipe. If the recipe was good, and I followed it, I would have the dessert I set out to make. If I tinkered around its edges, I would have a dessert of my own.

Simple rice pudding like Marie-Cécile's — rice and sweetened milk cooked until soft and thick — was the first dessert I found the courage to play with. It was easy and rewarding to simmer the rice with bits of dried fruit that plumped and flavored the milk, fat strips of orange or lemon zest, a cinnamon stick, a few crushed cardamom pods, a hunk of ginger or a spoonful of dried lavender, which no one liked as much as I did. One day I stirred some dark chocolate into the almost-finished pudding, and that became my family's favorite version. I folded crème fraîche into the cold pudding when I was serving it to guests. Company pudding also got a drizzle of caramel, honey, maple syrup or raspberry sauce, and sometimes fruit on top or alongside: apples or pears sautéed with butter and sugar in winter, berries in summer and orange slices year-round. Once, I topped the pudding

with ice cream and hot fudge and called it a sundae.

From pudding, I went on to cookies and cakes, pies, custards, brownies and blondies, finding them all amenable to tweaks and reshaping. The first time I follow a recipe, I make it just the way it's written: I want to understand what it's meant to be. And then, I follow my *pif*, often adding spices, nuts or extracts to batters, cajoling dough into new forms, making cupcakes from recipes designed for towering layer cakes, doubling up on frosting or going heavy on chocolate chunks in just about anything, because I now know I can. I don't tap my nose the way Marie-Cécile once did, but as I think about transforming her long-loved recipes, I'm almost tempted to.

Rice Pudding

Time: 1 hour

- ½ cup (100 grams) long-grain rice, preferably jasmine
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1 quart (946 mL) whole milk
- ¼ to ½ cup (50-67 grams) sugar (to taste)
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise, or 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract

1. Rinse the rice under cold running water, then turn it into a medium saucepan, and cover with water. Add the salt, bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Drain.

2. Rinse the saucepan with cold water, shake out excess (don't dry) and pour in the milk and sugar. If you're using a vanilla bean, scrape the pulp into the pan and drop in the pod (if you're using extract, you'll add it later). Bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Stay close: Milk is notorious for bubbling over. Lower the heat, stir in the rice and cook at a steady simmer, stirring frequently (especially at the start) for 30-40 minutes, or until the rice is very tender, the pudding feels just a little thick as you stir it and most of the milk has been absorbed (the pudding will have cooked down by about half). It's hard to give an exact time because it depends on the rice, the size of the pan and the amount of heat beneath it.

3. Scrape the pudding into a heatproof bowl, and remove the vanilla bean, if you've used it. If you're using extract, stir it in now. Cover (if you want to avoid a skin, press plastic wrap against the surface of the pudding), and cool to room temperature or refrigerate. Tightly covered, the pudding will keep in the fridge for about four days; serve cold or at room temperature.

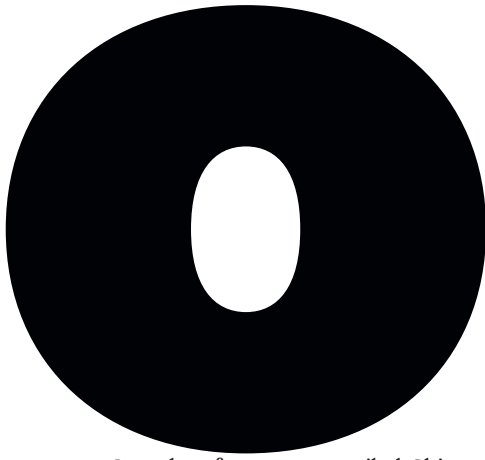
Yield: 6 to 8 servings. ♦

FROM A PENTHOUSE ON CENTRAL PARK, AN EXILED CHINESE BILLIONAIRE HAS BLOWN THE WHISTLE ON STAGGERING CORRUPTION IN HIS COUNTRY'S RULING CLASS — IF, THAT IS, HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH. BY LAUREN HILGERS. PHOTOGRAPH BY SASHA RUDENSKY.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO

GUO





n a recent Saturday afternoon, an exiled Chinese billionaire named Guo Wengui was holding forth in his New York apartment, sipping tea while an assistant lingered quietly just outside the door, slipping in occasionally to keep Guo's glass cup perfectly full. The tycoon's Twitter account had been suspended again — it was the fifth or sixth time, by Guo's count — and he blamed the Communist Party of China. "It's not normal!" he said, about this cycle of blocking and reinstating. "But it doesn't matter. I don't need anyone."

Guo's New York apartment is a 9,000-square-foot residence along Central Park that he bought for \$67.5 million in 2015. He sat in a Victorian-style chair, his back to a pair of west-facing windows, the sunset casting craggy shadows. A black-and-white painting of an angry-looking monkey hung on the wall to Guo's right, a hat bearing a star-and-wreath Soviet insignia on its head and a cigarette hanging from its lips. Guo had arrived dressed entirely in black, except for two silver stripes on each lapel. "I have the best houses," he told me. Guo had picked his apartment for its location, its three sprawling balconies and the meticulously tiled floor in the entryway. He has the best apartment in London, he said; the biggest apartment in Hong Kong. His yacht is docked along the Hudson River. He is comfortable and, anyway, Guo likes to say that as a Buddhist, he wants for nothing. If it were down to his own needs alone, he would have kept his profile low. But he has a higher purpose. He is going to save China.

Guo pitches himself as a former insider, a man who knows the secrets of a government that tightly controls the flow of information. A man who, in 2017, did the unthinkable — tearing open the veil of secrecy that has long surrounded China's political elite, lobbing accusations about corruption, extramarital affairs and murder plots over Facebook and Twitter. His YouTube videos and tweets have drawn in farmers and shopkeepers, democracy activists, writers and businesspeople. In China, people have been arrested for chatting about Guo online and distributing T-shirts with one of his slogans printed on the front ("This is only the beginning!"). In New York, Guo has split a community of dissidents and democracy activists down the

middle. Some support him. Others believe that Guo himself is a government spy.

Nothing in Guo's story is as straightforward as he would like it to seem. Guo is 47 years old, or 48, or 49. Although he has captured the attention of publications like *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, the articles that have run about him have offered only hazy details about his life. This is because his biography varies so widely from one source to the next. Maybe his name isn't even Guo Wengui. It could be Guo Wugui. There are reports that in Hong Kong, Guo occasionally goes by the name Guo Haoyun.

When pressed, Guo claims a record of unblemished integrity in his business dealings, both in real estate and in finance (when it comes to his personal life, he strikes a more careful balance between virility and dedication to his family). "I never took a square of land from the government," he said. "I didn't take a penny of investment from the banks." If you accept favors, he said, people will try to exploit your weaknesses. So, Guo claims, he opted to take no money and have no weaknesses.

Yet when Guo left China in 2014, he fled in anticipation of corruption charges. A former business partner had been detained just days before, and his political patron would be detained a few days afterward. In 2015, articles about corruption in Guo's business dealings — stories that he claims are largely fabrications — started appearing in the media. He was accused of defrauding business partners and colluding with corrupt officials. To hear Guo tell it, his political and business opponents used a national corruption campaign as a cover for a personal vendetta.

Whatever prompted Guo to take action, his campaign came during an important year for China's president, Xi Jinping. In October, the Communist Party of China (C.P.C.) convened its 19th National Congress, a twice-a-decade event that sets the contours of political power for the next five years. The country is in the throes of a far-reaching anti-corruption campaign, and Xi has overseen a crackdown on dissidents and human rights activists while increasing investment in censorship and surveillance. Guo has become a thorn in China's side at the precise moment the country is working to expand its influence, and its censorship program, overseas.

In November 2017, the Tiananmen Square activist Wang Dan warned of the growing influence of the C.P.C. on university campuses in the United States. His own attempts to hold "China salons" on college campuses had largely been blocked by the Chinese Students and Scholars Association — a group with ties to China's government. Around the same time, the academic publisher Springer Nature agreed to block access to hundreds of articles on its Chinese site, cutting off access to articles on Tibet, Taiwan and China's political elite. Reports emerged last year that China is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars quarterly to purchase ads on Facebook (a service that is blocked

within China's borders). In Australia, concerns about China's growing influence led to a ban on foreign political donations.

"That's why I'm telling the United States they should really be careful," Guo said. China's influence is spreading, he says, and he believes his own efforts to change China will have global consequences. "Like in an American movie," he told me with unflinching self-confidence. "In the last minutes, we will save the world."

PROPAGANDA, CENSORSHIP and rewritten histories have long been specialties of authoritarian nations. The aim, as famously explained by the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, is to confuse: to breed a combination of cynicism and gullibility. Propaganda can leave people in doubt of all news sources, suspicious of their neighbors, picking and choosing at random what pieces of information to believe. Without a political reality grounded in facts, people are left unmoored, building their world on whatever foundation — imaginary or otherwise — they might choose.

The tight grip that the C.P.C. keeps on information may be nothing new, but China's leadership has been working hard to update the way it censors and broadcasts. People in China distrust print and television media long before U.S. politicians started throwing around accusations of "fake news." In 2016, President Xi Jinping was explicit about the arrangement, informing the country's media that it should be "surnamed Party." Likewise, while the West has only recently begun to grapple with government-sponsored commenters on social media, China's government has been manipulating online conversations for over a decade.

"They create all kinds of confusion," said Ha Jin, the National Book Award-winning American novelist born in China's Liaoning Province, and a vocal supporter of Guo. "You don't know what information you have and whether it's right. You don't know who are the informers, who are the agents."

Online, the C.P.C. controls information by blocking websites, monitoring content and employing an army of commenters widely known as the 50-cent party. The name was used as early as 2004, when a municipal government in Henan Province hired a number of online commenters, offering a stipend of 600 yuan, or about \$72. Since then, the 50-cent party has spread. In 2016, researchers from Harvard, Stanford and the University of California-San Diego estimated that these paid commenters generated 448 million social-media comments annually. The posts, researchers found, were conflict averse, cheerleading for the party rather than defending it. Their aim seemed not to be engaging in argument but rather distracting the public and redirecting attention from sensitive issues.

In early 2017, Guo issued his first salvos against China's ruling elite through more traditional

channels. He contacted a handful of Chinese-language media outlets based in the United States. He gave interviews to the Long Island-based publication Mingjing News and to Voice of America — a live event that was cut short by producers, leading to speculation that V.O.A. had caved to Chinese government pressure. He called The New York Times and spoke with reporters at The Wall Street Journal. It did not take long, however, before the billionaire turned to direct appeals through social media. The accusations he made were explosive — he attacked Wang Qishan, Xi Jinping's corruption czar, and Meng Jianzhu, the secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, another prominent player in Xi's anti-corruption campaign. He talked about Wang's mistresses, his business interests and conflicts within the party.

In one YouTube video, released on Aug. 4, Guo addressed the tension between Wang and another anti-corruption official named Zhang Huawei. He recounted having dinner with Zhang when “he called Wang Qishan’s secretary and gave him orders,” Guo said. “Think about what Wang had to suffer in silence back then. They slept with the same women, and Zhang knew everything about Wang.” In addition, Guo said, Zhang knew about Wang’s corrupt business dealings. When Zhang Huawei was placed under official investigation in April, Guo claimed, it was a result of a grudge.

“Everyone in China is a slave,” Guo said in the video. “With the exception of the nobility.”

To those who believe Guo’s claims, they expose a depth of corruption that would surprise even the most jaded opponent of the C.P.C. “The corruption is on such a scale,” Ha Jin said. “Who could imagine that the czar of anti-corruption would himself be corrupt? It is extraordinary.”

Retaliation came quickly. A barrage of counteraccusations began pouring out against Guo, most published in the pages of the state-run Chinese media. Warrants for his arrest were issued on charges of corruption, bribery and even rape. China asked Interpol to issue a red notice calling for Guo’s arrest and extradition. He was running out of money, it was reported. In September, Guo recorded a video during which he received what he said was a phone call from his fifth brother: Two of Guo’s former employees had been detained, and their family members were threatening suicide. “My Twitter followers are so important they are like heaven to me,” Guo said. But, he declared, he could not ignore the well-being of his family and his employees. “I cannot finish the show as I had planned,” he said. Later, Guo told his followers in a video that he was planning to divorce his wife, in order to shield her from the backlash against him.

Guo quickly resumed posting videos and encouraging his followers. His accusations continued to accumulate throughout 2017, and he recently started his own YouTube channel (and has yet to divorce his wife). His YouTube videos are released according to no particular schedule,

sometimes several days in a row, some weeks not at all. He has developed a casual, talkative style. In some, Guo is running on a treadmill or still sweating after a workout. He has demonstrated cooking techniques and played with a tiny, fluffy dog, a gift from his daughter. He invites his viewers into a world of luxury and offers them a mix of secrets, gossip and insider knowledge.

Wang Qishan, Guo has claimed, is hiding the money he secretly earned in the Hainan-based conglomerate HNA Group, a company with an estimated \$35 billion worth of investments in the United States. (HNA Group denies any ties to Wang and is suing Guo.) He accused Wang of carrying on an affair with the actress Fan Bingbing. (Fan is reportedly suing Guo for defamation.) He told stories of petty arguments among officials and claimed that Chinese officials sabotaged Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which disappeared in 2014 en route to Beijing, in order to cover up

‘THEY ARE JEALOUS OF ME. THEY THINK: WHY IS HE SO HANDSOME? WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE LISTENING TO HIM?’

an organ-harvesting scheme. Most of Guo’s accusations have proved nearly impossible to verify.

“This guy is just covered in question marks,” said Minxin Pei, a professor at Claremont McKenna who specializes in Chinese governance.

The questions that cover Guo have posed a problem for both the United States government and the Western journalists who, in trying to write about him, have found themselves buffeted by the currents of propaganda, misinformation and the tight-lipped code of the C.P.C. elite. His claims have also divided a group of exiled dissidents and democracy activists — people who might seem like Guo’s natural allies. For the most part, the democracy activists who flee China have been chased from their country for protesting the government or promoting human rights, not because of corruption charges. They tell stories of personal persecution, not insider tales of bribery, sex and money. And perhaps as a consequence, few exiled activists command as large an audience as Guo. “I will believe him,” Ha Jin said, “until one of his serious accusations is proved to be false.”

Pei, the professor, warns not to take any of Guo’s accusations at face value. The reaction from the C.P.C. has been so extreme, however, that Pei believes Guo must know something. “He must mean something to the government,” he said. “They must be really bothered by this billionaire.” In May, Chinese officials visited Guo on visas that did not allow them to conduct official business, causing a confrontation with the F.B.I. A few weeks later, according to The Washington Times, China’s calls for Guo’s extradition led to a White House showdown, during which Jeff Sessions threatened to resign if Guo was sent back to China.

Guo has a history of cultivating relationships with the politically influential, and the trend has continued in New York. He famously bought 5,000 copies of a book by Cherie Blair, Tony Blair’s wife. (“It was to give to my employees,” Guo told me. “I often gave my employees books to read.”) Guo has also cultivated a special relationship with Steve Bannon, whom he says he has met with a handful of times, although the two have no financial relationship. Not long after one of their meetings, Bannon appeared on Breitbart Radio and called China “an enemy of incalculable power.”

Despite Guo’s high-powered supporters and his army of online followers, one important mark of believability has continued to elude him. Western news organizations have struggled to find evidence that would corroborate Guo’s claims. When his claims appear in print, they are carefully hedged — delivered with none of his signature charm and bombast. “Why do

you need more evidence?” Guo complained in his apartment. “I can give them evidence, no problem. But while they’re out spending time investigating, I’m waiting around to get killed!”

THE DETAILS OF Guo’s life may be impossible to verify, but the broad strokes confirm a picture of a man whose fortunes have risen and fallen with the political climate in China. To hear Guo tell it, he was born in Jilin Province, in a mining town where his parents were sent during the Cultural Revolution. “There were foreigners there,” Guo says in a video recorded on what he claims is his birthday. (Guo was born on Feb. 2, or May 10, or sometime in June.) “They had the most advanced machinery. People wore popular clothing.” Guo, as a result, was not ignorant of the world. He was, however, extremely poor. “Sometimes we didn’t even have firewood,” he says. “So we burned the wet twigs from the mountains — the smoke was so thick.” Guo emphasizes this history: He came from hardship. He pulled himself up.

The story continues into Guo’s pre-teenage years, when he moved back to his hometown in Shandong Province. He met his wife and married her when he was only 15, she 14. They moved to Heilongjiang, where they started a small manufacturing operation, taking advantage of the early days of China’s economic rise, and then to Henan. Guo got his start in real estate in a city called Zhengzhou, where he founded the Zhengzhou Yuda Property Company and built the tallest building the city had seen so far, the Yuda International Trade Center. According to Guo, he was

(Continued on Page 53)

Why Are Our Most Important Teachers Paid the Least?



By Jeneen Interlandi
Photographs by Natalie Keyssar

Many preschool teachers live on the edge of financial ruin. Would improving their training — and their pay — improve outcomes for their students?



One
snowy

February morning at the Arbors Kids preschool branch in downtown Springfield, Mass., 38-year-old Kejo Kelly crouched low over a large, faded carpet and locked eyes with a blond-haired boy of 3. It was circle time, and Kelly was trying to get each of her 13 tiny students to articulate a feeling.

“Good morning, good morning, and how do you do?” she sang softly to the little boy. “Jamal’s silly! Amir’s happy! And how about you?” Kelly’s classroom was known for what one visiting specialist called its “singsonginess.” The good-morning bit was standard fare, but Kelly also sang her own impromptu ditties throughout the day. She’d found that a good melody could cajole even her most obstinate students into completing dreaded tasks: There was a song about washing hands, and one about cleaning up messes, and another about how shouting and running were for outside only.

Most children squealed with delight when their turn came to name a feeling: They offered up happys and sillys with abandon. Even the more bashful ones, who had to be prompted, were visibly thrilled by Kelly’s attention, which seemed to beat out a limited toy-dinosaur collection as the class’s chief attraction. But not the blond-haired boy. During the opening exercise, in which each child got a turn to dance in the center of the circle to a song of his choosing, he neither picked a song nor danced to the one Kelly offered. Instead, he flung himself at her feet and writhed like a fish out of water, then went completely still in a belligerent game of possum.

Now, at least, Kelly had made eye contact.

“How are you today?” she asked, holding both of his hands in hers as she spoke. “Are you happy? Angry? Sad? Or silly?”

If any of her students — or “little friends,” as she called them — had sung her song back to her just then, Kelly would have answered that she was stressed. Three teachers had called out from work that morning, including the assistant teacher assigned to Kelly’s room. Massachusetts state law prohibits the child-to-teacher ratio in full-day preschool classrooms from exceeding 10 to 1, so normally, Kelly had 13 students and one co-teacher. But staff shortages were a common occurrence at Springfield Arbors, where teachers

earned \$10 an hour on average and staff turnover was high. In practice, there was a lot of juggling: On any given day, students and teachers shuffled from one room to another, combining some classes and breaking others up in an effort to keep each room within the permissible ratio. That day, Kelly would absorb six additional students and one co-teacher from another classroom.

The extra little ones didn’t trouble her as much as the prospect of being stuck late again. She was supposed to be off by 4 p.m., but most of her kids didn’t leave until 5:30, and the teacher who was scheduled to stay late was among those who were out. Of the teachers who were present, all either had children of their own to fetch from day care or night classes to get to at the community college. Kelly had neither. Her own kids were 17 and 20, and she had long since forgone higher education in favor of working.

But none of that concerned the blond boy, who was blinking and smiling at her. Kelly kept her own eyes locked on his even as another student — a little girl with a devilish grin and a long dark ponytail — leapt onto Kelly’s back and began tugging at her hairnet. “How are you?” Kelly asked the boy again. “Can you tell me a feeling?”

The ponytailed girl was hardly the only one threatening to break the moment open. Someone was crying. Someone else was throwing toys not meant to be thrown and jumping on toys not meant to be jumped on. Someone smelled like poop and needed to be taken into the bathroom and guided through the basics of toilet use. And several someones were demanding things of Kelly specifically — that she hug them, or carry them round the room on her shoulders, or play a special game with just them. The children were ravenous for their teacher. And for each moment that she focused exclusively on the little blond boy, she risked losing the rest of her class to an irrevocable anarchy.

To an outsider, it was tough to say which of the children’s behaviors were normal for 3- and 4-year-olds and which were signs of bigger issues. Increasingly, classrooms like the one over which Kelly presides are being eyed by social scientists and policymakers as both the place where problems emerge and the safety net that stands the



Above: Kejo Kelly’s classroom at the Arbors Kids preschool branch in downtown Springfield, Mass, now called Bright Futures.

Previous pages: Kelly in the Springfield Arbors playground.

best chance of addressing them. Preschool is often thought of as mere babysitting. But a growing body of research suggests that when done right, it can be much more than that. An effective early-education program can level the playing field for low-income black and Hispanic students relative to their white or wealthier counterparts, so much so that gaps in language comprehension and numeracy can often disappear by the start of kindergarten. And according to at least two longitudinal studies, the very best programs can produce effects that reach far beyond those early years, increasing the rates of high-school completion and college attendance among participants and reducing the incidence of teenage parenthood, welfare dependence and arrests.

The community Kelly taught in was low-income by all the standard metrics. Many of her students came from single-parent households — some from teenage mothers, at least one from foster care — and nearly all of them qualified for state-funded child care vouchers. Programs like Springfield Arbors that accepted such vouchers



received about \$35 a day for each child, enough to cover basics like food and art supplies but not enough to pay for on-site behavioral specialists or occupational therapists. The school did make referrals. By Massachusetts law, all 3- and 4-year-olds are eligible to receive special-needs services at the local public school; there is even a free shuttle to shepherd them back and forth. But the waiting list for those services can be long, and in the winter of 2016, few parents at the school bothered to put their children's names on it.

So Kelly kept her own fractured vigil — taking note of which students couldn't control their emotions, or sit still for the life of them, or engage with others in a meaningful way — and giving those students whatever extra attention could be spared. She sometimes imagined the classroom as a bubble, inside which her students were temporarily spared from the hazards of everyday life. Her job, as she saw it, was to hold that bubble open for the ones who couldn't always hold it open themselves.

"Come on, my friend," she said now to the little blond boy. "Talk to me."

The idea that we can deliberately influence the cognitive and social development of very young children is a fairly new one. In the early 20th century, some doctors considered intellectual stimulation so detrimental to infants that they routinely advised young mothers to avoid it. At the beginning of the 1960s, the prevailing wisdom was only slightly less dire. Trying to

stimulate a very young mind wasn't considered dangerous so much as pointless, because 0-to-4-year-olds were "concrete thinkers," incapable of theorizing or abstraction.

But such thinking began to shift with two seminal preschool experiments: the HighScope Perry Preschool Study, which began in 1962 in Ypsilanti, Mich., and the Carolina Abecedarian Project, which began in 1972 in and around Chapel Hill, N.C. Perry provided free half-day classes and weekly home visits to 58 black children living in a high-poverty district near Detroit. Abecedarian provided 57 children of a similar cohort with full weekday care for their first five years of life, including not only preschool but also health care and social services. Both programs employed highly trained teachers and kept student-to-teacher ratios low. The Perry study also used a curriculum rooted in "active participatory learning," in which cognitive and social skills are developed through educational games that the children themselves initiate and direct.

The short-term results of these interventions were mixed. Some of the preschoolers, for example, were more aggressive at the end of the programs than they had been at the start, even if this difference disappeared by second grade. Decades later, however, when researchers went back, they found a surprise. At age 21, the Abecedarian children were half as likely to have been teenage parents and 2.5 times more likely to have enrolled in college than the control group, who did not attend preschool. At 40, the Perry children had higher median incomes than their control-group peers; they were less likely to be on welfare and less likely to have been arrested. Those results were not uniform. For example, while Perry seemed to reduce arrests and increase

high-school graduation rates, Abecedarian had no impact on either. But the findings still caused a stir among social scientists and educators: Both programs appeared to have affected the children in ways that could still be seen in adulthood.

In the decades since those results were published, the biological and social sciences have radically altered our understanding of early-childhood development. We now know that infants and toddlers have the capacity for complex thought. According to a recent report from the Institute of Medicine, they can understand other people's intentions, reason about cause and effect and intuit the more basic aspects of addition and subtraction. We also know that the earliest years are a period of intense and rapid neural development — M.R.I. studies suggest that 80 percent of all neural connections form by age 3 — and that a child's ability to capitalize on these years is directly related to her environment. Social scientists have shown that, owing to a shortage of books and toddler-friendly conversation, children from families on welfare understand roughly one-third the number of words that their middle-class peers do by the start of kindergarten.

Scientists and educators have begun to build on this new understanding, creating pedagogy and designing curriculums around the needs of our earliest learners. But one crucial question remains unanswered: What actually works? What are the defining features of an excellent preschool education? "There is no empirically based definition of 'high-quality preschool,'" says Mark Lipsey, a social scientist at Vanderbilt University. "We throw the phrase around a lot, but we don't actually know what it means."

Part of the problem is that the benefits of a preschool education tend to manifest unevenly. Developmental gains made by the start of kindergarten can be enough to close racial achievement gaps, but those gains often evaporate by third or fourth grade, a phenomenon that education researchers call the fade-out effect. And so far, the longer-term rebounds found in Perry and Abecedarian — in which children who attend good preschools fare better in adulthood than their peers who attend no such program — have been difficult to parse or replicate. In 2017, a group of prominent early-education researchers published a consensus statement declaring that preschool classrooms were a "black box" and that much more research was needed before anyone could say with certainty which ingredients were essential to improving long-term developmental trajectories.

Amid that uncertainty, though, at least two things seem clear: Children in low-income and minority neighborhoods stand to gain (or lose) the most from whatever preschool system we ultimately establish. And the one-on-one exchanges between students and teachers — what developmental psychologists call "process quality"

'Teaching preschoolers is every bit as complicated and important as teaching any of the K-12 grades, if not more so. But we still treat preschool teachers like babysitters.'

— may well be the key to success or failure. In other words, if preschool classrooms really are crackling with the kind of raw power that can change the course of a life, that power most likely resides in the ability of teachers like Kelly to connect with students like the little blond boy.

But if teachers are crucial to high-quality preschool, they are also its most neglected component. Even as investment in early-childhood education soars, teachers like Kelly continue to earn as little as \$28,500 a year on average, a valuation that puts them on par with file clerks and switchboard operators, but well below K-12 teachers, who, according to the most recent national survey, earn roughly \$53,100 a year. According to a recent briefing from the Economic Policy Institute, a majority of preschool teachers are low-income women of color with no more than a high-school diploma. Only 15 percent of them receive employer-sponsored health insurance, and depending on which state they are in, nearly half belong to families that rely on public assistance. “Teaching preschoolers is every bit as complicated and important as teaching any of the K-12 grades, if not more so,” says Marcy Whitebook, a director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley. “But we still treat preschool teachers like babysitters. We want them to ameliorate poverty even as they live in it themselves.”

The solution to this paradox seems obvious: Hold preschool teachers to the same standards as their K-12 counterparts, and pay them a salary commensurate with that training. But that proposition is rife with intractable questions. Who will pay the higher salaries? How will current teachers rise to meet the new credential requirements? And if they can’t or won’t, who will take their place? At the heart of those questions is this one: What, exactly, makes a good preschool teacher?

Springfield Arbors preschool consists of one long hallway on the ground floor of an assisted-living facility, with several classrooms strung along either side. The surrounding neighborhood, known as Six Corners, is home to a high school (the same one that Kelly attended), a community college and a steady beat of drug- and gang-related violence. Six Corners children live on the down side of what’s known in education circles as the achievement gap. According to analysis done by the Massachusetts-based nonprofit Strategies for Children, between 12 and 14 percent of third graders in some Six Corners schools read at or above grade level, compared with between 37 and 43 percent in nearby Forest Park, a neighborhood known for its well-preserved Victorian homes, and as the birthplace of Dr. Seuss, the city’s most famous native son.

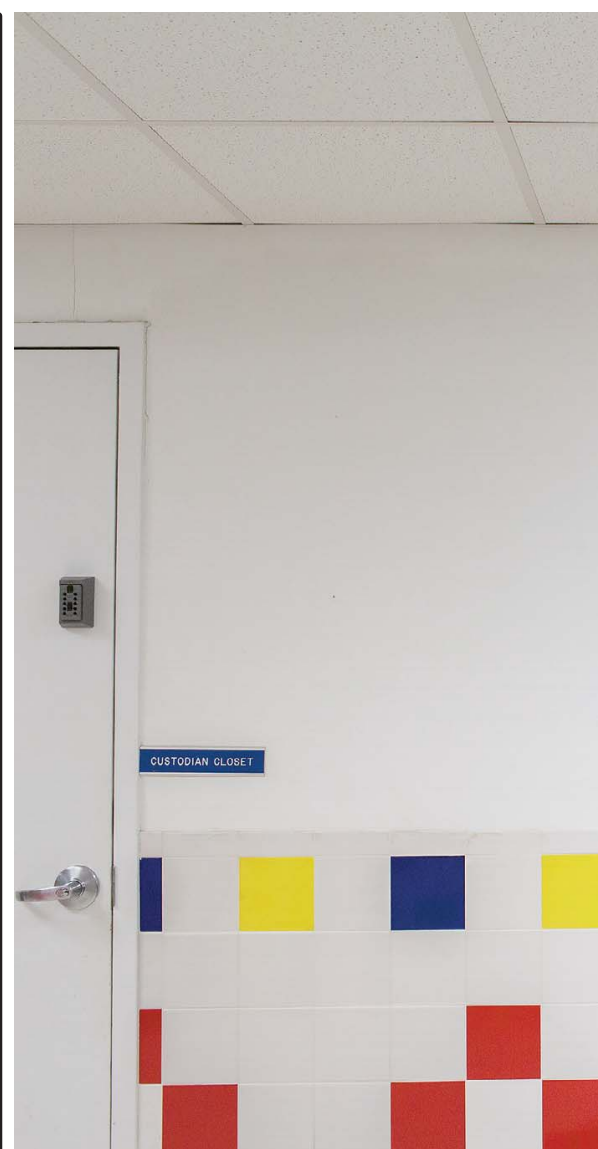
Kelly came to preschool teaching about a decade ago, when the local caterer she was working for

abruptly shut down. For a single mother with a high-school diploma, the options in Springfield were limited: Home health aides, retail salespeople and food-service workers all made about the same salary. Receptionists and secretaries made more, but those jobs required office experience, and the work itself sounded dull. Kelly wanted a job helping people. She had only ever worked in food service, but when she found a local preschool with an opening in the kitchen, she saw a chance to pivot.

She started by making herself known in the classroom, lingering to help out when she delivered lunches, introducing herself to parents in the hallway, befriending the teachers and asking them about their work. When an assistant-teacher spot opened up, she jumped on it. She considered it a promotion, even though the teacher’s salary (\$9 an hour) was actually \$1 an hour less than what she made as a school cook. For the first year, she split her time between the kitchen and the classroom while she earned her Child Development Associate certification, or C.D.A., which required her to complete a nine-month course that met for four hours every Saturday at the local Y.M.C.A.

At first she thought that credential would help her carve a path to some greater edification: a higher degree, maybe, and a higher wage along with it. But those dreams were quickly jettisoned. In 2011, just as she was completing her first class at the community college, an electrical fire tore through the three-family home that Kelly and her two children shared with her grandmother, mother, aunt and cousin. Her relatives’ apartments weren’t damaged much, but Kelly and her children lost nearly all their possessions. Worse, the fire seemed to usher in a

‘You can’t say the goal is to level the playing field for low-income kids and then cut low-income teachers who have been doing this work forever out of the equation.’



newly dark chapter in her life. In 2012, her younger brother died in a horrific car accident; a year later, her cousin was shot and killed, and her aunt died. Her daughter’s boyfriend — the father of her newborn grandson — was also killed, in another shooting. Somewhere in the middle of those heartaches, the preschool she worked at closed, and Kelly moved on to Springfield Arbors.

The C.D.A. taught her the basics of lesson planning, class structure and family engagement, but her real training came through trial and error. Kelly’s classroom was often chaotic, but parents quickly learned that they could come to her with concerns, even after their children had aged out of her classroom. One mother asked her to step in as foster parent during a particularly tough time. Others hired her to babysit when they picked up night shifts at one job or another, so that Kelly might welcome a given child at 8 in the morning and not return him to his mother until well after 10 or 11



Above: Preschoolers at Egenolf Early Childhood Center in Elizabeth, N.J., part of the state's Abbott program for high-quality early education.

at night. The work was exhausting, but she found she had a knack for it — an instinct for what her students needed, an ability to relate to them and, when all else failed, a willingness to keep trying.

One early-spring afternoon, when a rainstorm kept the children indoors during what would normally be playtime, Kelly tried arranging a field trip to the basement hallway — the only substitute playground at Springfield Arbors. But when too many of them fell into tantrum mode at the same time, she changed tack and set up the portable chalkboard at the front of the room. It did not take long for one, then three, then a dozen of the children to notice her chalking letters and gather around. The letter of the week was “D,” and she had been teaching the students what words it was used in and showing them how to write and pronounce it. “Down, over, over,” she said in a long, slow drawl, as she drew first the spine and then the hump of the letter. She was

speaking to one little boy specifically, and when she was done, she handed the chalk to him and held his hand as he repeated her movements. Then she removed her hand and nodded at him to try on his own.

At first, the class was enthralled by this demonstration. But then one little boy started screaming. Grandma, an elderly volunteer who sometimes came for an hour or two and mostly sat in back of the room on a small couch, grabbed the boy’s arm and yanked him to her side. “Cut it out,” she said. “Come sit!” The boy yanked his arm back, flopped onto the floor and wailed. Kelly kept her focus on the students at

the blackboard. Eventually the screamer ran back over to the circle and forced another little boy off his seat, which made the other boy cry, which distracted the rest of the class and set half of them wandering off, before anyone had made a full D.

When nap time came it seemed impossible that any one of the tiny, furious bodies twirling through the room could be stilled long enough to let sleep come, let alone all of them at once. But the sleeping mats were soon laid out across the room, and the children took their cue, except for the little blond boy, who wouldn’t lie still. One of Kelly’s colleagues sat on the floor near him, urging him to calm himself. “Relax your body,” she said over and over, patting his back. But it was no use, so she traded spots with Kelly. Kelly leaned over the little blond boy and made eye contact with him and allowed him to grab at her hands with his. This seemed to do the trick. When he settled in just enough to release his grip, she took her cellphone out and played soft music, just for him, which clinched the deal.

By the time all the children fell asleep, Kelly was sitting cross-legged on the floor with four little ones unfurled like flower petals around her. She was rubbing each of their backs in turn with one hand — rub, rub, pat, next; rub, rub, pat, next — while rocking a fifth in her other arm. Her classroom had a total of 19 students just then, and in order for her to grab lunch, the school’s cook had to be summoned to sit with the sleeping children. She pulled a pack of noodles from her coat pocket and tiptoed toward the door. “It’s a ramen week,” she whispered. “I just spent a fortune on household stuff yesterday, and my son has two basketball games this week.” The high school charged \$5 admission to each game, and Kelly rarely missed one, even when it meant skimping on meals.

She returned a few minutes later with a bowl of steaming noodles and two co-teachers. As the children snoozed, the three women slipped into a whispered chat. One student’s voucher was about to expire, and the student’s mother had yet to contact the voucher office to renew it. They debated who was to blame for this looming catastrophe; but how the voucher office worked was a mystery, even to these women who were both mothers and teachers.

“You can’t call them,” one teacher said. “They never answer. You have to go down there.”

“She must have missed her appointment,” another added.

“They don’t always give appointments,” Kelly said. “They never gave my daughter one for my grandson.”

One teacher, Miss RJ, was summoned to the office: The nurse at her own children’s school was calling to say that both of them were sick. But Springfield Arbors was *(Continued on Page 48)*





FINE LINES

Inside one of America's last pencil factories.

Photographs by Christopher Payne

Text by Sam Anderson

A pencil is a little wonder-wand: a stick of wood that traces the tiniest motions of your hand as it moves across a surface. I am using one now, making weird little loops and slashes to write these words. As a tool, it is admirably sensitive. The lines it makes can be fat or thin, screams or whispers, blocks of concrete or blades of grass, all depending on changes of pressure so subtle that we would hardly notice them in any other context. (The difference in force between a bold line and nothing at all would hardly tip a domino.) And while a pencil is sophisticated enough to track every gradation of the human hand, it is also simple enough for a toddler to use.

Such radical simplicity is surprisingly complicated to produce. Since 1889, the General Pencil Company has been converting huge quantities of raw materials (wax, paint, cedar planks, graphite) into products you can find, neatly boxed and labeled, in art and office-supply stores across the nation: watercolor pencils, editing pencils, sticks of charcoal, pastel chalks. Even as other factories have chased higher profit margins overseas, General Pencil has stayed put, cranking out thousands upon thousands of writing instruments in the middle of Jersey City.

Over the past few years, the photographer Christopher Payne visited the factory dozens of times, documenting every phase of the





Far left: These graphite cores were heated in an oven to remove moisture and harden the material.

Left: Pastel extrusions, used for colored pencils, are laid by hand onto grooved wooden boards, where they will dry before being placed in pencil slats. The extruding machine that produced them usually handles a single color each week, after which it is scrubbed clean to prepare it for the next. The worker seen here matches her nail polish and shirt to each week's color.

Previous pages: Graphite cores cooling after being dipped in heated wax.

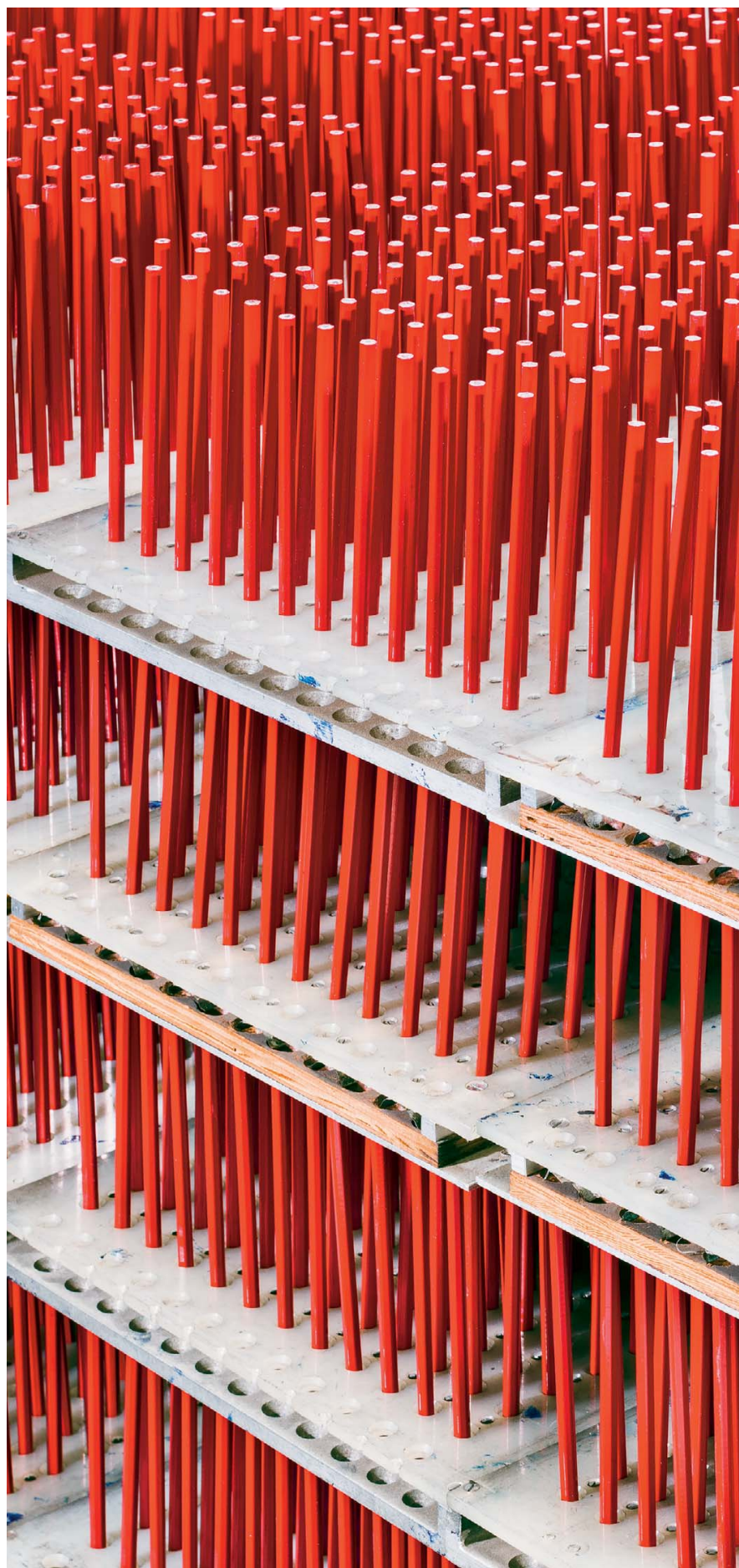
manufacturing process. His photographs capture the many different worlds hidden inside the complex's plain brick exterior. The basement, where workers process charcoal, is a universe of absolute gray: gray shirts, gray hands, gray machines swallowing gray ingredients. A surprising amount of the work is done manually; it can take employees multiple days off to get their hands fully clean. Pencil cores emerge from the machines like fresh pasta, smooth and wet, ready to be cut into different lengths and dried before going into their wooden shells.

Other parts of the factory are eruptions of color. Red pencils wait, in orderly grids, to be dipped into bright blue paint. A worker named Maria matches the color of her shirt and nail polish to the shade of the pastel cores being manufactured each week. One of the company's signature products, white pastels, have to be made in a dedicated machine, separated from every other color. At the tipping machine, a whirlpool of pink erasers twists, supervised patiently by a woman wearing a bindi.

Payne conveys the incidental beauty of functional machines: strange architectures of chains, conveyor belts, glue pots, metal discs and gears thick with generations of grease. He captures the strangeness of seeing a tool as simple as a pencil disassembled into its even simpler component parts. He shows us the aesthetic magic of scale. Heaps of pencil cores wait piled against a concrete wall, like an arsenal of gray spaghetti. Hundreds of pencils sit stacked in honeycomb towers. Wood shavings fly as fresh pencils are dragged across the sharpening machine, a wheel of fast-spinning sandpaper.

In an era of infinite screens, the humble pencil feels revolutionarily direct: It does exactly what it does, when it does it, right in front of you. Pencils eschew digital jujitsu. They are pure analog, absolute presence. They help to rescue us from oblivion. Think of how many of our finest motions disappear, untracked — how many eye blinks and toe twitches and secret glances vanish into nothing. And yet when you hold a pencil, your quietest little hand-dances are mapped exactly, from the loops and slashes to the final dot at the very end of a sentence.

Photographs like these do something similar. They preserve the secret origins of objects we tend to take for granted. They show us the pride and connection of the humans who make those objects, as well as a mode of manufacturing that is itself disappearing in favor of automation. Like a pencil, these photos trace motions that may someday be gone.



Editing pencils are sharpened at each end: One makes red marks, the other blue. The trays seen here will be turned upside down and dunked in blue paint by a dipper machine, marking the blue half.







Ferrules — the metal bands that cinch around the bases of erasers — are loaded onto a conveyor and sent to a tipping machine.

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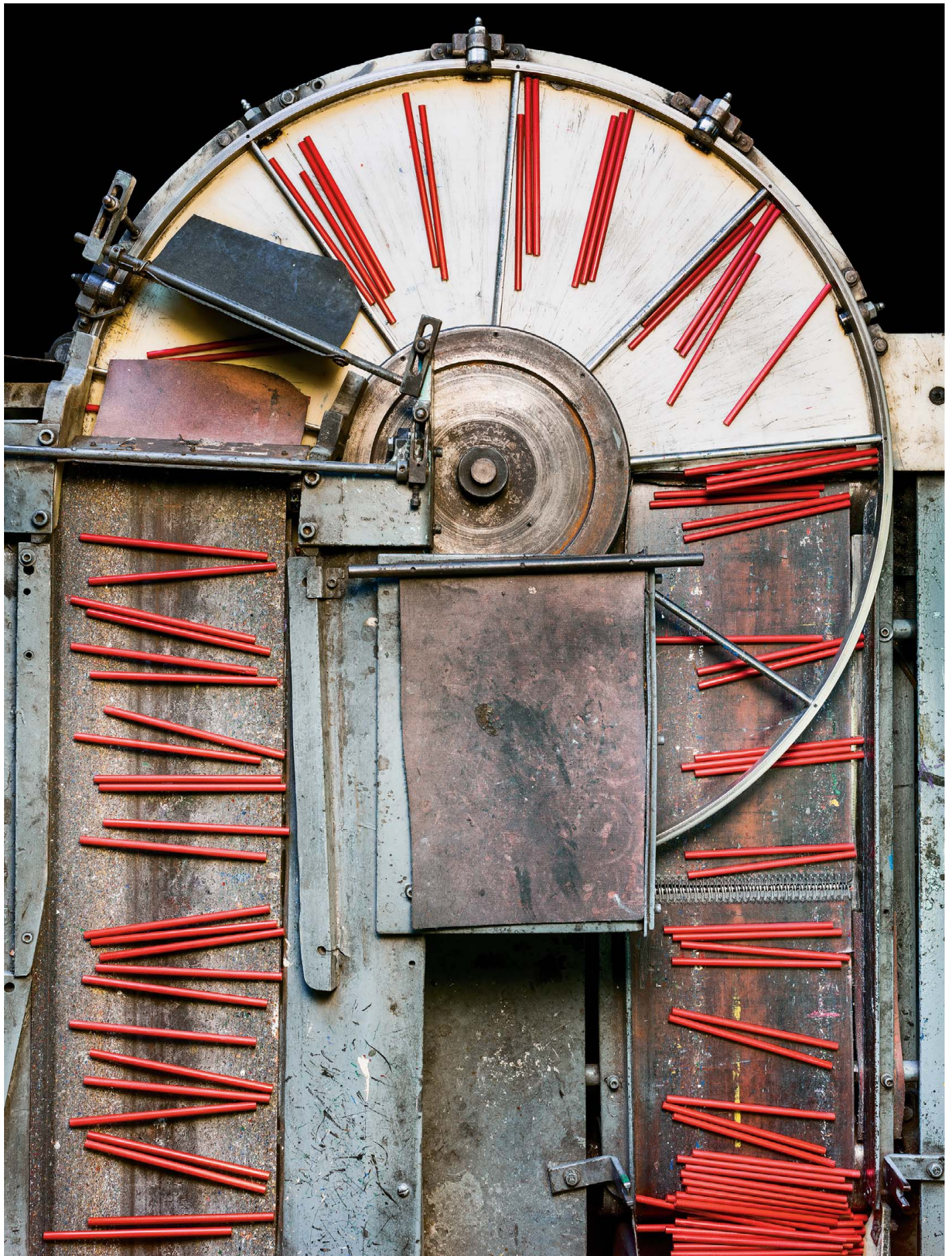
Separate Group For Females with verification

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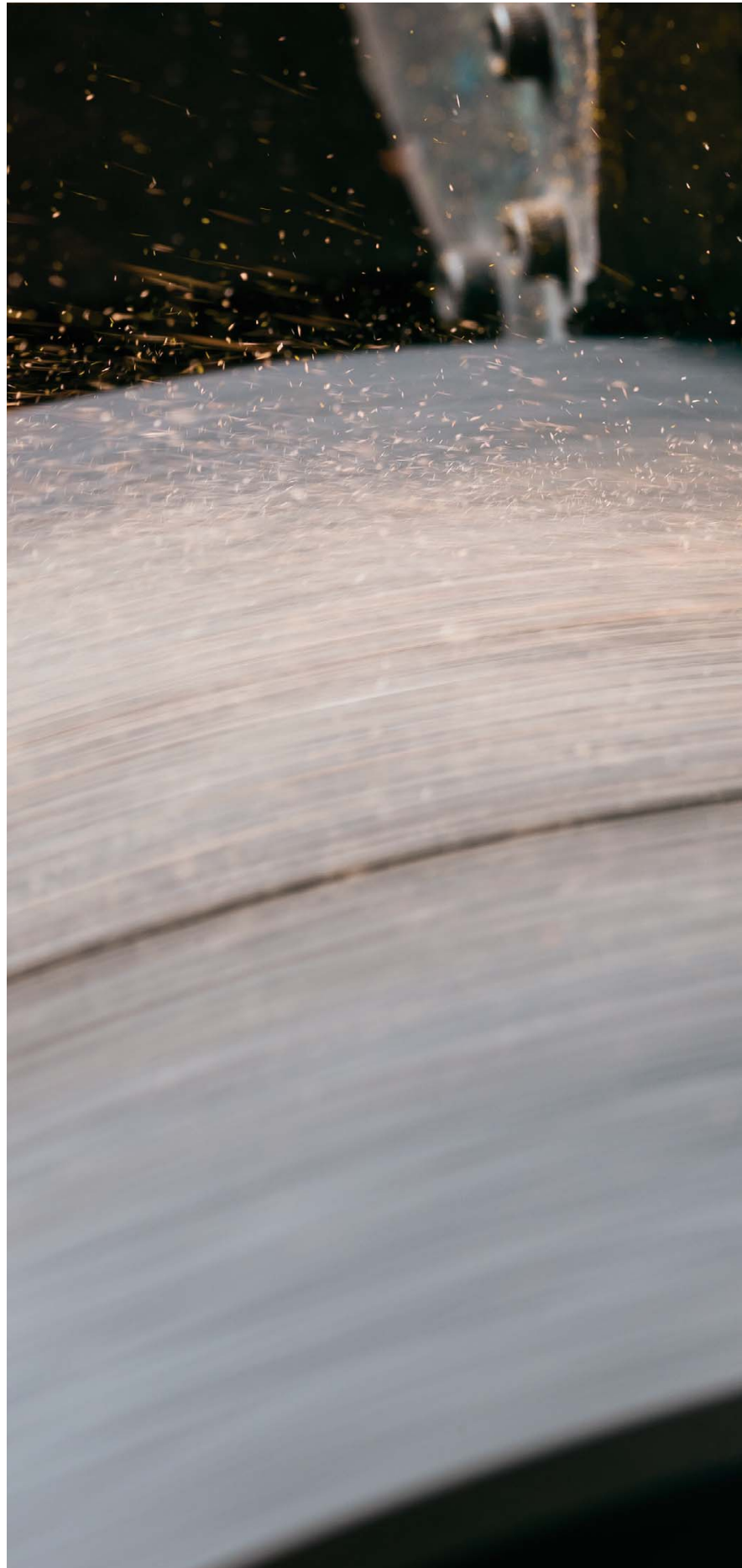
Right: Extrusions of graphite are collected for recycling.

Far right: After receiving a coating of paint, pencils are returned by conveyor for another layer. Most pencils receive four coats of paint.





Pencils are sharpened
by rolling them across a
high-speed sanding belt.





still short-staffed. So Miss RJ was stuck there, and her own children were stuck with someone else.

In the United States, the care of children who have not yet aged into public school has long run on two tracks, separated mostly by household income. The upper-and-middle-income track was designed specifically to engage and nourish young minds at their ripest juncture. The low-income track originated in the social-welfare system; its programs were created not just for children but also for their mothers, who needed to work. As such, they tend to be larger and staffed by teachers with high-school diplomas. They also tend to be chronically underfunded.

The last half-century is littered with attempts to merge these two tracks — that is, to make the day cares of the poor more like the preschools of the middle class and wealthy. But those efforts have long been plagued by a deep cultural ambivalence toward both charity and working mothers. When Head Start, the nation's first public preschool, began in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty, its goals were twofold: to provide underprivileged preschoolers the tools they needed to keep up with their better-off peers; and to offer an economic boost for their mothers, some of whom were recruited and trained to work at the centers as educators. The program was part of what would come to be known as the country's biggest peacetime mobilization of human resources, but enthusiasm for it was short-lived. Amid concerns about "family weakening" in the 1970s and "welfare queens" in the 1980s, funding for early education stalled. Today Head Start serves less than one-third of the nation's eligible students. As part of a wave of reforms about a decade ago, Head Start began requiring half of its lead teachers to hold bachelor's degrees. It's too soon to tell what impact this has had on teaching and learning, but one unintended consequence is that it's harder for teachers like Kelly to find work at the centers.

Head Start is not the only program to raise credentialing requirements for preschool teachers. In 1998, as a result of a lawsuit filed by the Education Law Center, an advocacy group for New Jersey public-school children, the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered 31 low-income school districts to provide high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds. Among other things, the court's definition of "high quality" included full-day programs staffed by college-educated teachers who earned salaries equal to those of their K-12 counterparts. The resulting program — known as the Abbott preschool program, after the lawsuit that led to the mandate — represents one of the first efforts among education reformers to replicate the models of Perry and Abecedarian and bring them to scale.

One recent morning in a brightly colored classroom at Egenolf, an Abbott preschool in Elizabeth, N.J. A 3-year-old girl with soft brown pigtails and a white shirt examined a row of water bottles, each of which had a pine cone submerged in a different liquid, and dictated observations to her teacher, Yamila Lopez Hevia. The cone in the "cold water" bottle was closing up. The one in warm water was closing, too — but more slowly. "And what do we think is going on?" Lopez asked. "Why might that happen?" After a brief pause, the girl pulled up two big words, each of which she had heard from Lopez.

The pine cones, she explained, were *a-dap-ting* to their *en-vi-ron-ment*.

It was the crowning moment to a much larger project that began when the children noticed that it was getting colder out and that the leaves were changing color. Lopez led them through a dialogue about how trees and other plants get ready for winter. From there, they turned their attention to what animals do. Lopez took the class to a local park, where they noticed squirrels collecting nuts and looked for birds who might be getting ready to migrate. In the end, they circled back to themselves, discussing sweaters and warm coats and winter boots. "We introduced some big concepts," Lopez told me when I visited her class recently. "And it all started with that one simple question: 'What do you see happening around you?'" The technique was called scaffolding, and it was a key tenet of current preschool pedagogy, which Lopez learned as a student teacher.

According to that pedagogy, preschoolers discover the world around them through trial, error and experimentation. They learn by doing things more than by thinking about them. The techniques that educators and developmental psychologists have devised for cultivating this natural tendency are decidedly Socratic. Rather than standing at a blackboard chalking letters or leading a large group in song, they assert, teachers like Kelly and Lopez should pay close attention to what the children themselves are interested in, or puzzled by, and respond to that. Any given moment is ripe with the opportunity to teach in this way, but doing it well requires a suite of disparate skills. A squirrel collecting nuts for the winter might hold a biology lesson; but to offer that lesson, a teacher needs to recognize the moment as it occurs. She also needs a grounding in that discipline and a clear sense of where the student in question sits on the developmental spectrum.

"The bottom line is really individualized intentional teaching," says Steven Barnett, co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University. "And there's specialized knowledge that preschool teachers need that's different even from what kindergarten and first-grade teachers need." For example, he says, preschoolers are apt to reverse letters. "It really helps to understand why they do that, if you want to help them get it right," he says. "It's not an isolated thing.

Like, let's take my sippy cup. My whole life up to now, my sippy cup is a sippy cup no matter what way I hold it — upside down, sideways, whatever. But now you give me this thing called a *d*. And I put it down one way and it's a *b*. And another way and you tell me it's a *p*. What's with that?"

Barnett and others say that the ability to guide preschoolers through this stage of development takes a college degree. Teachers who don't have rich vocabularies or groundings in math and science can't impart those things to their students, he says. In a 2015 report, the Institute of Medicine agreed. The report argued that holding preschool teachers to lower standards than public-school teachers has fed the perception that the work itself is low-skill and in turn has helped justify policies that keep preschool teachers' wages down and prevent them from growing professionally.

But teachers themselves have been divided over the prospect of new job requirements. Many of them migrated to the field precisely because it did not require a higher degree. College — navigating financial aid, carving out the hours for class and homework — takes time and money and know-how. And for those who have been doing the job for years or even decades, the suggestion that they need additional training can feel like an insult.

Abbott addressed these issues head-on. It provided intensive college-admissions counseling, including help with financial-aid forms and scheduling. It also covered tuition for teachers in the program and nudged the college programs to bring their classes to the preschools. "We had the college professors go into the Newark schools and hold their classes there so that the teachers didn't have to travel," Barnett says. "We also paid for substitutes when the teachers needed to go to classes during the day, because we knew that not everybody could do this at night school." The process was neither cheap nor easy nor fast, he adds. Many teachers struggled through remedial courses and community college before making their way into bachelor's degree programs. All told, it costs \$14,000 per child per year, more than twice the national average.

Those figures have made Abbott a lightning rod in the debate over public preschool in general and teacher credentials in particular. Critics say that the program is far too expensive given how little it may affect student outcomes in the long term (Abbott studies show fade-out effects, albeit less significant ones than in many other preschool studies). But proponents argue that it's unfair to judge the success or value of such programs by performance in the middle-school or high-school years — in part because there may be rebound effects later on. And in any case, the program works demonstrably well in achieving its primary objective: preparing children for elementary school. It has also helped stabilize the preschool work force. Because Abbott teachers earn solid

middle-class salaries — between \$55,000 and \$57,000 per year on average — staff turnover is less of a problem, which in turn means that classrooms are less chaotic.

This latter benefit underscores all the others: A successful preschool teacher needs to make her students feel safe and help them understand their emotions and regulate their own behavior. Children can't concentrate long enough to absorb new ideas or develop new skills if every slight sets them off crying or swinging at other children, or if they feel constantly threatened or mistrustful of their surroundings. And teachers who earn poverty-level wages can't be expected to create consistent and reassuring classrooms. "Security is an essential foundation for early learning," says Whitebook of U.C. Berkeley. "An older kid might be able to learn about math or history from a teacher they don't like. But a young child, a preschool-aged child, is going to have a very hard time learning anything from an adult that they feel averse to. For very young children especially, you have to meet them where they are, both literally and figuratively, and you have to make them feel safe in that space."

Little of what experts like Barnett and Whitebook espouse would surprise Kelly, who in the time I spent in her classroom seemed always to be on bended knee, talking one child or another through their tears, gently but firmly explaining the reality of other people's feelings or helping them understand the relationships between their physical behavior and its consequences. One day, I watched her spend a full 15 minutes on a small boy in bright orange shorts who had gotten in the habit of tearing through the room at full speed. In the course of a morning, he had knocked two little girls to the ground and destroyed a block city that two other children were building. The assistant teacher had threatened him with suspension from class, to no avail. Kelly, applying the same squat-down-direct-eye-contact treatment that she used on the blond-haired boy, led him through a string of questions:

"What happens when we run?"

"We go fast!"

"What else happens?"

"We ... hit things?"

"Why do we hit things when we run fast, but not when we walk?"

"Because ... it takes longer to stop!"

From there they discussed how barreling into a person might make that person feel. Eventually the boy concluded that it was best to save fast running for outside, where there was more space. It was as good a lesson in physics and feelings as any 4-year-old was likely to get, in any school.

But later that day, the same little boy found himself puzzling over another riddle of movement and speed. It was recess, and the class was scattered across the narrow strip of wood chips and strewn toys that constituted the Springfield

Arbors playground. The boy in orange shorts huddled with three other boys in a cubbyhole at the base of a plastic fort. The group whispered and drew in the dirt with twigs for several minutes before abruptly bursting out across the yard. They took possession of a large rubber ball from some uninterested girls and set about throwing it as high as they could. The boy in the orange shorts took several consecutive turns, throwing the ball higher each time. When it landed atop a tarp that was fastened to the side of the building, the boys exchanged giddy confused looks: Why had the ball landed there instead of on the ground? What should they do next? The boy looked across the playground toward Kelly, but she was busy brokering a time-share deal between two archrivals over the class's only Malibu Barbie.

If there was a shortcoming to Kelly's work, it was that her skills were almost always deployed to resolve a crisis or defuse tension, and rarely to nurture some budding curiosity. Kelly didn't doubt the vastness of her students' inner mental worlds; nor did she discount the importance of meeting them where they were or of treating them with frankness and intelligence. In fact, she seemed to grasp those principles intuitively. What she lacked was the support she needed to build on her natural talents or cultivate her own ambitions.

One such ambition was taking more of a leadership role at the center. In April 2016, she was unofficially promoted from lead teacher to assistant director — an office job that came with a small raise. But then in June, two teachers quit and another was fired, and she was sent back to the classroom. "I feel like I can't move forward," she told me at the time. "I keep picking up slack for all these other people moving forward with their careers, and their lives. And I'm stuck."

That feeling had become more pronounced lately, owing to a string of incidents outside the classroom. First was the robbery: When she and her daughter stopped at the bank one evening after work, they were held at gunpoint by a man in a ski mask demanding all the money behind the counter. The entire episode passed in 15 minutes. But while Kelly's daughter compartmentalized it quickly, Kelly replayed it in her head for weeks, enumerating to herself all the ways that trouble had nearly missed them: She did not normally stop at that branch, but had taken a different route home to run an errand. They had been about to leave; Kelly's hands were on the door when the gunman came through it from the other side, thrusting his weapon in her face. He was never caught, but the Springfield Police Department sent the Kelly household a pamphlet on how to deal with the aftermath of a robbery.

Then, as summer approached, Kelly received a summons asking her to testify in a murder trial. The actual killing took place in 2013, on her brother's birthday. It was the first of his birthdays since his death, and

(Continued on Page 51)

Answers to puzzles of 1.7.18

VOWEL PLAY

J	U	L	S	P	A	S				S	M	A	R	M	C	O	R	A
U	N	I	T	O	R	T	A			L	O	A	D	E	R	A	P	E
D	E	L	M	L	A	N	N	A	L	S	R	I	D	E				
A	S	S	E	S	S	D	I	E	M	S	P	C	Y	F				
H	Y	E	N	A			T	R	I	J	E	T	S	K	I	D	S	
			I	T	O		S	T	I	N	E	S	U	M	E	R		
D	A	M	N	F	L	C	L	L	P	O	S	E	D	A	S			
E	L	S	A	T	S	E	A		L	I	P	O	S	S	L	T		
V	A	N	T	A	G	E				M	I	N	E	D	N	B	A	
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W	H	M	I	T	R	C	K	S	T	R	P	R	M	P				
H	E	R	B	A	L	A	M	I	C	A	L	A	G	E	A	R		
E	L	S	A	H	I	B					R	A	D	I	R	A		
L	L	D	C	A	N	I	T			I	R	W	I	N	D	U	I	N
P	O	S	I	T	E	D	C	H	C	H	N	G	E	S	P	N		
			G	O	Y	A	S	E	T	H	E	L	S	A	D			
			T	R	I	G	G	A	I	N	S	O	N			T	R	A
W	H	T	L	E	R	I	S	L	A	U	N	C	H					
H	E	L	I	S	T	R	O	B	E	S	T	R	N	G	T			
A	T	O	Z	K	I	S	S	E	D		H	O	U	N	D	E	S	S
M	A	N	E	S	T	E	E	D		P	E	S	T	S	T	P		

KENKEN

3	1	5	4	2
4	5	1	2	3
1	2	4	3	5
5	3	2	1	4
2	4	3	5	1

4	1	2	5	7	6	3
3	2	1	7	4	5	6
7	6	3	1	5	4	2
6	3	5	4	2	7	1
1	7	4	2	6	3	5
5	4	6	3	1	2	7
2	5	7	6	3	1	4

ACROSTIC

ELINOR DEWIRE, [THE] FUNKY CHICKEN — I suppose I'm a bit eccentric with my chickenpalooza kitchen. A giant resin rooster perches over my oven. My whimsical flying hen clock with her fried egg pendulum ticks rhythmically from the wall. Tick, tock, cluck, clock.

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| A. Elf owl | I. Wretch | Q. Yolk |
| B. Lavish | J. Ichthyic | R. Chicanos |
| C. Impeccably | K. Rumply | S. Hickory |
| D. Nutmeg | L. Ektachrome | T. Ice milk |
| E. Oviposit | M. Feathers | U. Concert dates |
| F. Rowlock | N. Uplift | V. Kitsch |
| G. Dumpling | O. Necromancy | W. East Wing |
| H. Eric Knight | P. Klezmer | X. Niche |

CON-SEQUENCES

- Corkscrew 2. Yacht club
- Old-school
- Lengthwise 5. Fifth wheel 6. Gulf Stream 7. Lymph gland
- Porch swing
- Pitch-black 10. Earth science 11. Straight flush 12. Ranch dressing

ELBOW ROOM

■			⑦	■		④	2
■		■		■			3
						■	1
						③	■
			■				1
	■		⑤			■	2
		■					1
	■			⑧		■	2
⑧		■	■			④	2
2	2	2	2	2	0	3	1

Answers to puzzle on Page 50

SPELLING BEE

Martyrdom (3 points). Also: amatory, aorta, attar, doormat, dotard, dotty, marmot, martyr, matador, mortar, motor, motto, orator, oratory, ratty, rotary, rotator, rotor, tardy, tarot, tarry, tartar, tattoo, tatty, toady, today, toddy, tomato, tommyrot. If you found other legitimate dictionary words in the beehive, feel free to include them in your score.

DIAGRAMLESS STARTING HINT

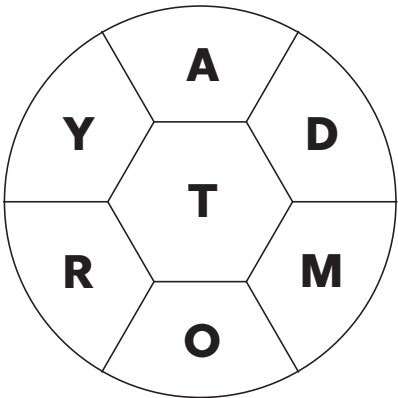
1-Across starts in the 7th square of the top row.

SPELLING BEE

By Frank Longo

How many common words of 5 or more letters can you spell using the letters in the hive? Every answer must use the center letter at least once. Letters may be reused in a word. At least one word will use all 7 letters. Proper names and hyphenated words are not allowed. Score 1 point for each answer, and 3 points for a word that uses all 7 letters.

Rating: 10 = good; 18 = excellent; 26 = genius



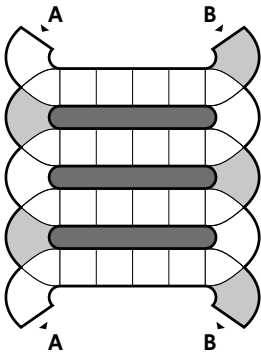
Our list of words, worth 32 points, appears with last week's answers.

WINDING DOWN

By Patrick Berry

Answers to Path A clues wind down the grid along the unshaded path, one after another, starting in the upper left. Answers to Path B clues wind down the opposite way, starting in the shaded space at the upper right. When the grid is filled, the letters in the shaded squares will spell a word that can precede "down."

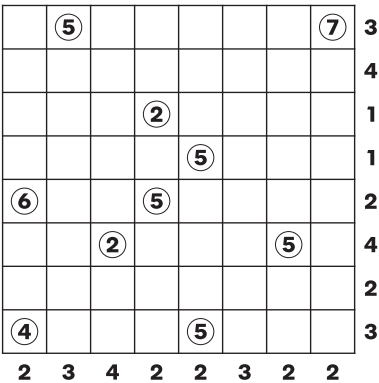
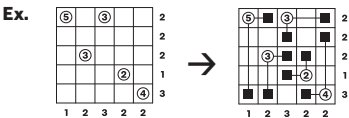
Path A
1952 novel about baseball prodigy Roy Hobbs (2 wds.) • Oliver of English history • Company that owns Shopping.com • Milanese matron's title
Path B
Lighter fluid • Sense of ____ (joke appreciation ability) • Horn-honking clown on "Howdy Doody" • Infamous bankruptcy of 2001 • Primary point



ELBOW ROOM

By Tinh Van Duc Lai

Draw two lines in an "L" shape out of each numbered circle so that the total number of squares reached by the two lines equals the number in the circle. The numbers beside the grid specify how many ends of lines (shown by black squares in the example) appear in their respective rows and columns. Lines never intersect.



DIAGRAMLESS

By Paula Gamache

This diagramless crossword is 17 squares wide by 17 squares deep and has top/bottom symmetry (that is, the grid pattern is reflected over a central horizontal axis). The first square across is given with last week's answers.

Note: Six answers in this puzzle are each missing a word, as suggested by the shape of the completed grid.

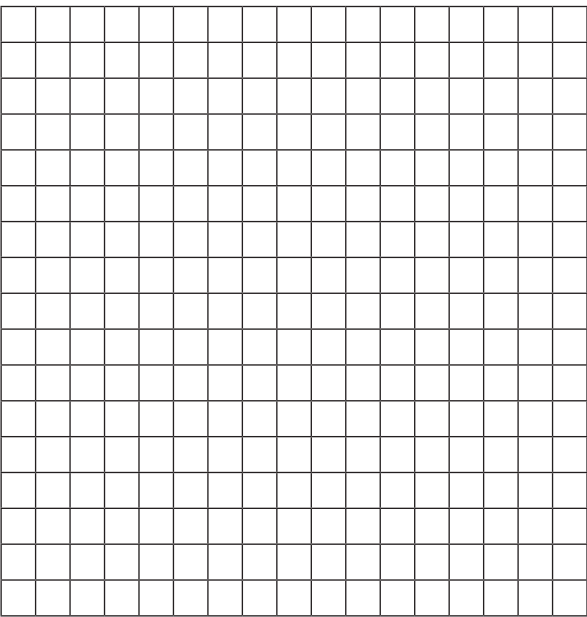
- ACROSS**

 - 1 Italian ice cream
 - 7 Spanish butterfly
 - 9 Leisurely business dining experience
 - 13 Extended time off from work
 - 15 Drudgery
 - 17 Wonderland cake message
 - 18 Large amount
 - 20 Mayberry boy
 - 22 Stratagems
 - 23 State-of-the-art
 - 25 Bit of voodoo
 - 26 Roman hint to this puzzle's theme
 - 27 Freshen by opening a window, say
 - 29 Subscribes
 - 32 Appears
- 33 Says nasty things about
 - 35 Cleveland player, for short
 - 38 Musical about Jean Valjean, colloquially
 - 41 "Get ____"
 - 44 Solo of "Star Wars"
 - 45 Maui strings, in brief
 - 46 Brought back
 - 47 Like pinot noir
 - 48 Binged
 - 49 Grand event in a tent
 - 54 Infatuated
 - 55 Boy or girl scout's hand sign
 - 57 From the Occident
 - 58 Put right

DOWN

 - 1 Opening in a fence

- 2 Composer Satie
- 3 Queue
- 4 Impressionist's activity
- 5 Ratted out
- 6 The Buckeyes of the N.C.A.A.
- 7 Soldier's food pack, for short
- 8 Formic acid producer
- 9 "And what do we have here!"
- 10 Blows away
- 11 Pigeon's sound
- 12 Jay-Z's genre
- 13 Mustachioed Salvador
- 14 Yours, in Tours
- 16 Stead
- 17 Prefix with center
- 19 Cold dish that often includes chickpeas
- 21 End of an office tel. no.
- 24 Magi
- 28 Tricks
- 29 Pathetic
- 30 Wrath
- 31 .jpg alternative
- 34 Risk with wet ink
- 35 Word after cable or cattle
- 36 Yank, for one
- 37 Middle of a famous boast



- 39 Self-assembly furniture giant
- 40 The end, in Essex
- 42 Eins, zwei, drei, vier, ____
- 43 Military vet
- 44 One side of a marital tiff
- 47 Charlotte ____ (dessert)
- 48 Muesli bit
- 50 Atlanta-based media inits.
- 51 Sikorsky or Stravinsky
- 52 Former French president Coty
- 53 Pull an all-nighter
- 54 Colt .45, e.g.
- 56 Set down

Kelly and her sister were sitting up in her sister's kitchen, weathering the internal storm that such anniversaries tend to bring, when they heard shots. Kelly looked down from the second-story window to find a gaggle of teenagers, including her nephew, scrambling for cover. She grabbed every glass object she could get her hands on — plates, vases, dishes — and hurled them out the window at the gunman, ducking in between throws to protect herself. When the shooting stopped, she and her sister ran out to the street, where they found one boy down. Kelly gave him CPR, and even got him back to breathing for a few minutes, but he died before the ambulance arrived. In addition to reminding her of that day, the court summons had the effect of putting her children on edge; there had already been more than one shooting in their neighborhood that summer, and it was never good to be the only person standing between an accused killer and a possible life sentence.

Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at work. But with each fresh calamity, she felt the walls of her own bubble closing in.

One late afternoon, as fall tipped into winter, a squirrel perched itself on the ledge just outside Kelly's classroom window and caught the attention of a small boy with milk-chocolate skin and big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. When Kelly walked by, he tugged at the leg of her pants. She scooped him up, rested him on her hip and, for a brief moment, watched with him as the creature scurried up and down a tree at the playground's edge. "Yes," she said. "That's a squirrel!" The boy continued to point, but it was late in the day, and Kelly was tired and distracted, so the conversation ended there.

In the fall of 2017, Kelly and her colleagues received word that Springfield Arbors preschool would change owners this January, and become Bright Futures. No one could say for sure what that meant for the teachers or their students. The anxiety surrounding this change reflected an uncertainty that reached far beyond Kelly's classroom. In the last decade or so, the percentage of children served by state programs has doubled; 43 states and the District of Columbia now have public preschool programs of one kind or another. But that recent progress is now being tempered by federal indifference: The Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has yet to appoint a director of the Office of Early Learning, established under the Obama administration to help facilitate the integration of preschool into the public-education system; and President Trump has eliminated preschool funding increases from his proposed budget. What's more, experts are still divided over what credentials early childhood educators should have.

Last year, for instance, the District of Columbia school district took a step toward professionalizing its preschool work force when it declared that all preschool teachers would be required to obtain an associate degree by 2020. The measure met with controversy even among some preschool proponents. One argument holds that preschool teachers with college educations have not been shown to improve students' educational outcomes compared with those who do not have degrees but have been trained in child development. "The evidence for a B.A. is pretty weak," says Bruce Fuller, an education researcher at U.C. Berkeley. "It probably screens for people who engage in richer language, but the actual training in college — I'm not sure it has any effect."

The other argument is that increasing credential requirements without first raising wages places too much of a burden on already-overtaxed teachers. Mary Alice McCarthy, director of the Center on Education and Skills at the New America foundation, has proffered a different approach: apprenticeships. Like many human-service jobs, she says, teaching is best taught through "iterative interactions," where a person with experience helps a newcomer identify and respond to challenges. And the structure of an apprenticeship may be better suited to teachers who need to work full time while they learn. "You can't say the goal is to level the playing field for low-income kids," McCarthy says, "and then cut low-income teachers who have been doing this work forever out of the equation."

Amy O'Leary, a former preschool teacher and current campaign director for Strategies for Children, agrees: "The existing preschool work force is much more diverse than the elementary work force, and we want to preserve that," she says. "If you hire only those teachers who have the means to do it on their own, you displace the existing ones, who often come from the communities they teach in and have their own specialized knowledge of what it is to live in neighborhoods like Six Corners."

A Philadelphia-area community college, a union and a number of local preschools joined forces to make the first attempts at training preschool teachers in this way. The program pairs apprentice teachers with mentors as they progress through a structured curriculum while working in the classroom full time. They get four wage increases over a two-year period, so that by the time they complete the program, which grants them both an associate degree and a journeyman card, they are already earning \$2 to \$3 more an hour. "That's a life-changing increase," McCarthy says.

It's also classroom-changing. The program is still in its infancy, but I spoke with apprentices, teachers and center directors who say that improvements in classroom dynamics and staff turnover, not to mention actual teaching, are already apparent. "I feel like I've learned more about how their little brains work, and also about the best ways to reach them," says Briana

Gonsiewski, an apprentice at Spin preschool in Philadelphia, who taught for 10 years before joining the program in 2017. "Before, I did not see playing on the ground as something structural. Now I get how they are really learning all the time, and I can start to see how to tap into that."

It will take a few years more to say how the apprentice program stacks up against programs like Abbott, or even like Springfield Arbors, and if the teacher training affects student outcomes in any measurable way. And then individual communities will have to decide if the gains are worth the price.

"We have to come to terms with the fact that this is going to cost a lot more money," O'Leary says. "And to accept that, I think we still have to shed a lot of prejudices about working mothers and the working poor, and what it means to help them." In the meantime, with limited funds, policymakers and educators are caught between competing imperatives: Use the money they have to expand access so that as many students as possible receive some form of early education, or use it to improve quality in specific places like Six Corners, where both the need and potential payoff are greatest.

Investing in teacher education, as Abbott or the apprenticeship programs do, means choosing the latter, and that's a tough sell to taxpayers who need child care themselves. "Politicians are understandably reluctant to tell parents who need to work and who are on the waiting list for subsidies, 'Well, we're not going to expand access this year, because we are putting that money into quality,'" Barnett says. "It's true that the lowest-income areas stand to benefit the most from good preschools. But it's not just the very poor that are struggling. The story of inequality is increasingly that the very rich are leaving everyone else behind."

For now, Kelly and hers were making do. Her son was accepted at six of the 10 colleges he applied to. He had qualified for some scholarship money, which would help bring his tuition down, but Kelly was scrambling to come up with the rest. She had found a second job working nights and weekends at Kohl's, and was cutting corners where she could. One such economy was her car: a 2001 Buick Park Avenue, bought from a friend for \$700. The engine was solid, but the gas meter was busted, so that you had to pay very close attention to the amount of driving you did relative to the amount of money you had put in the tank, or you'd end up stranded.

Kelly learned this the hard way one evening. After a day filled with staff shortages and screaming children, she was heading through Six Corners toward home when the car sputtered to a stop. Both snow and darkness were falling fast, but there was a gas station just two miles up the road. Kelly called her daughter to say she'd be home late. Then she fished a plastic container from the trunk, hunched her back against the cold and set out for the long walk by herself. ♦

SUPREME INTELLIGENCE

By Joel Fagliano

ACROSS

- 1 Mike who was the 2017 N.B.A. Coach of the Year
 8 Presidential advisory grp.
 11 Covers
 18 Worked on some screenwriting?
 19 Major work
 21 Like the French directors Eric Rohmer and Jean-Luc Godard
 22 Poseur
 23 Kid's creation out of pillows
 24 Kind of elephant
 25 Last monarch of the House of Stuart
 26 Destructive sort
 29 Photographer Adams
 30 Lines in geometry
 31 Android's counterpart
 32 ___ Xtra (soda)
 34 Scoundrel
 36 Worked from home?
 39 Cease communication
 41 Bug-studying org.
 42 Steinbeck novella set in La Paz
 46 Topic for Sun Tzu
 47 Has as a tenant
- 49 Shakespearean king
 50 Retired chat service
 51 Military term of address
 52 Perry of fashion
 53 "I knew that would happen!"
 58 "Twelfth Night" twin
 62 Thin pancake
 63 Spa treatment
 64 Flowery
 66 ___ Nation (record label for Jay-Z and J. Cole)
 67 Illegal interference ... or what can be found in this puzzle's 1st, 3rd, 7th, 15th, 19th and 21st rows?
 71 Stewbum
 72 Noted brand of guitars
 73 Use an ice pack on
 74 What a conductor might conduct
 75 Online admin
 77 Where a big bowl is found
 79 Indication to bow slowly, say
 80 Creator of the "Planet Money" podcast
 82 Like a boiled lobster
- 83 Buoy
 85 Poe ode
 89 Nicknamed
 90 Largest moon in the solar system
 91 Got down
 92 Discharges
 94 Reasons for sneezin'
 95 They might be backless
 97 Fan favorite
 98 Frequent Twitter poster
 99 Thick hairstyle
 103 For the case at hand
 105 Hooded cloak
 109 Home to the historic Moana Hotel
 110 Connecticut city near New Haven
 112 ___ speak
 113 Kind of race
 115 Dum-dums
 116 In ___ (entirely)
 117 Bit of advice before taking off?
 118 Evasive basketball move
 119 Brooding sort
 120 Häagen-Dazs alternative

DOWN

- 1 Big name in Scotch
 2 Appliance brand
 3 Word before goat or state
 4 Sporks have small ones
 5 Suffix with crap
- 6 Bird bills
 7 Now there's a thought!
 8 Sign by a pool
 9 Features of monarch butterfly wings
 10 Add salt to, maybe
 11 Santa ___

- 12 Former Buick sedans
 13 "Victory is mine!"
 14 Covered with water
 15 Sleek fabrics
 16 Closest to base?
 17 Dry, as wine
 20 Daze
 27 Jessica of "The Illusionist"
 28 Empty
 33 Chocolate purchase
 35 Language with six tones
 36 180s
 37 Dallas pro
 38 Limit on what can be charged
 39 "All right, let's play!"
 40 Butcher's stock
 42 Nickname for Springsteen
 43 Comics superhero with filed-off horns
 44 Joins forces?
 45 Run off
 46 Actor Wheaton
 48 Prefix with -nomial
 50 Joins forces
- 54 Insurance giant whose name begins with a silent letter
 55 Spoke tediously, with "on"
 56 Just for laughs
 57 Marble marvel
 59 Cuban province where the Castros were born
 60 Found (in)
 61 Nail-polish remover
 63 Trivia venue
 65 Margarine container
 68 Sign of wind on water
 69 Range that's home to the Mark Twain National Forest
 70 Unit of 74-Across
 76 It stands for January
 78 Raiders' org.
 79 Big name in chips
 81 Hamlet's plot in "Hamlet"
 84 "To what ___?"
 85 Bill
 86 Italian castle town
 87 Advance warning
 88 Nancy Drew's boyfriend
- 89 "Finally!"
 90 Roman Empire invader
 93 Part of S.S.N.: Abbr.
 94 Wrap tightly
 96 Looks for purchases
 98 Crested ___ (Colorado ski resort)
 99 Like Santa's suit on Dec. 26
 100 Short-story writer Bret
 101 The slightest margin
 102 Shows nervousness, in a way
 104 Taking action
 106 Kids' character who says, "People say nothing is impossible, but I do nothing every day"
 107 What has casts of thousands?
 108 Hair-removal brand
 110 Grate stuff
 111 Potent venom source
 114 "___-haw!"

Puzzles Online: Today's puzzle and more than 9,000 past puzzles, nytimes.com/crosswords (\$39.95 a year). For the daily puzzle commentary: nytimes.com/wordplay.

KENKEN

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 5x5 grid will use the digits 1–5. A 7x7 grid will use 1–7.

3-	1-		3-		5-	90×	1-		3-	17+	
	1-		3+	2-			36×	1			
					336×				2÷	8+	
4	20×							16+		3-	3÷
2-		4-		2÷	6×	4			120×		
						6-		1-			2-
	7+		3		2-		1		3-		

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only 25 when he made this first deal.

The string of businesses and properties that Guo developed provide some of the confirmable scaffolding of his life. No one disputes that Guo went on to start both the Beijing Morgan Investment Company and Beijing Zenith Holdings. Morgan Investment was responsible for building a cluster of office towers called the Pangu Plaza, the tallest of which has a wavy top that loosely resembles a dragon, or perhaps a precarious cone of soft-serve ice cream. Guo is in agreement with the Chinese media that in buying the property for Pangu Plaza, he clashed with the deputy mayor of Beijing. The dispute ended when Guo turned in a lengthy sex tape capturing the deputy mayor in bed with his mistress.

There are other details in Guo's biography, however, that vary from one source to the next. Guo says that he never took government loans; Caixin, a Beijing-based publication, quoted "sources close to the matter" in a 2015 article claiming that Guo took out 28 loans totaling 588 million yuan, or about \$89 million. Guo, according to Caixin, eventually defaulted. At some point in this story — the timeline varies — Guo became friends with the vice minister of China's Ministry of State Security, Ma Jian. The M.S.S. is China's answer to the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. combined. It spies on civilians and foreigners alike, conducting operations domestically and internationally, amassing information on diplomats, businessmen and even the members of the C.P.C. Describing Ma, Guo leans back in his chair and mimes smoking a cigarette. "Ma Jian! He was fat and his skin was tan." According to Guo, Ma sat like this during their first meeting, listening to Guo's side of a dispute. Then Ma told him to trust the country. "Trust the law," he told Guo. "We will treat you fairly." The older master of spycraft and the young businessman struck up a friendship that would become a cornerstone in Guo's claims of insider knowledge, and also possibly the reason for the businessman's downfall in China.

Following the construction of Pangu Plaza in Beijing, Guo's life story becomes increasingly hard to parse. He started a securities business with a man named Li You. After a falling-out, Li was detained by the authorities. Guo's company accused Li and his company of insider trading. According to the 2015 article in Caixin, Li then penned a letter to the authorities accusing Guo of "wrongdoing."

As this dispute was going on, China's anti-corruption operation was building a case against Ma Jian. In Guo's telling, Ma had long been rumored to be collecting intelligence on China's leaders. As the anti-corruption campaign gained speed and officials like Wang Qishan gained power, Ma's well of intelligence started to look like a threat. It was Guo's relationship with Ma, the tycoon maintains, that made officials nervous.

Ma was detained by the authorities in January 2015, shortly after Guo fled the country. Soon after Ma's detention, accounts began appearing in China's state-run media claiming that Ma had six Beijing villas, six mistresses and at least two illegitimate sons. In a 2015 article that ran in the party-run newspaper *The China Daily*, the writer added another detail: "The investigation also found that Ma had acted as an umbrella for the business ventures of Guo Wengui, a tycoon from Henan Province."

In the mix of spies, corrupt business dealings, mistresses and sex scandals, Guo has one more unbelievable story to tell about his past. It is one reason, he says, that he was mentally prepared to confront the leaders of the Communist Party. It happened nearly 29 years ago, in the aftermath of the crackdown on Tiananmen Square. According to Guo, he had donated money to the students protesting in the square, and so a group of local police officers came to find him at his home. An overzealous officer fired off a shot at Guo's wife — at which point Guo's younger brother jumped in front of the bullet, suffering a fatal wound. "That was when I started my plan," he said. "If your brother had been killed in front of your eyes, would you just forget it?" Never mind the fact that it would take 28 years for him to take any public stand against the party that caused his brother's death. Never mind that the leadership had changed. "I'm not saying everyone in the Communist Party is bad," he said. "The system is bad. So what I need to oppose is the system."

On an unusually warm Saturday afternoon in Flushing, Queens, a group of around 30 of Guo's supporters gathered for a barbecue in Kissena Park. They laid out a spread of vegetables and skewers of shrimp and squid. Some children toddled through the crowd, chewing on hot dogs and rolling around an unopened can of Coke. The adults fussed with a loudspeaker and a banner that featured the name that Guo goes by in English, Miles Kwok. "Miles Kwok, NY loves U," it said, a heart standing in for the word "loves." "Democracy, Justice, Liberty for China." Someone else had carried in a life-size cutout of the billionaire.

The revelers decided to hold the event in the park partly for the available grills but also partly because the square in front of Guo's penthouse had turned dangerous. A few weeks earlier, some older women had been out supporting Guo when a group of Chinese men holding flags and banners showed up. At one point, the men wrapped the women in a protest banner and hit them. The park was a safer option. And the protesters had learned from Guo — it wasn't a live audience they were hoping for. The group would be filming the protest and posting it on social media. Halfway through, Guo would call in on someone's cellphone, and the crowd would cheer.

Despite this show of support, Guo's claims have divided China's exiled dissidents to such an extent

that on a single day near the end of September, two dueling meetings of pro-democracy activists were held in New York, one supporting Guo, the other casting doubt on his motivations. ("They are jealous of me," Guo said of his detractors. "They think: Why is he so handsome? Why are so many people listening to him?") Some of Guo's claims are verifiably untrue — he claimed in an interview with *Vice* that he paid \$82 million for his apartment — and others seem comically aggrandized. (Guo says he never wears the same pair of underwear twice.) But the repercussions he is facing are real.

In December, Guo's brother was sentenced to three years and six months in prison for destroying accounting records. The lawsuits filed against Guo for defamation are piling up, and Guo has claimed to be amassing a "war chest" of \$150 million to cover his legal expenses. In September, a new set of claims against Guo were made in a 49-page document circulated by a former business rival. For Ha Jin, Guo's significance runs deeper than his soap-opera tales of scandal and corruption. "The grand propaganda scheme is to suppress and control all the voices," Jin said. "Now everybody knows that you can create your own voice. You can have your own show. That fact alone is historical." In the future, Jin predicts, there will be more rebels like Guo. "There is something very primitive about this, realizing that this is a man, a regular citizen who can confront state power."

Ho Pin, the founder of Long Island's *Mingjing News*, echoed Jin. *Mingjing's* reporters felt that covering Guo was imperative, no matter the haziness of the information. "In China, the political elite that Guo was attacking had platforms of their own," Ho said. "They have the opportunity, the power and the ability to use all the government's apparatus to refute and oppose Guo Wengui. So our most important job is to allow Guo Wengui's insider knowledge reach the fair, open-minded people in China." Still, people like Pei urge caution when dealing with Guo's claims. Even Guo's escape raises questions. Few others have slipped through the net of China's anti-corruption drive. "How could he get so lucky?" Pei asked. "He must have been tipped off long before."

At the barbecue, a supporter named Ye Rong tucked one of his children under his arm and acknowledged that Guo's past life is riddled with holes. There was always the possibility that Guo used to be a thug, but Ye didn't think it mattered. The rules of the conflict had been set by the Communist Party. "You need all kinds of people to oppose the Chinese government," Ye said. "We need intellectuals; we also need thugs."

Guo, of course, has his own opinions about his legacy. He warned of dark times for Americans and for the world, if he doesn't succeed in his mission to change China. "I am trying to help," he told me. "I am not joking with you." He continued: "I will change China within the next three years. If I don't change it, I won't be able to survive." ♦

Gabrielle Union Isn't Done Talking About Sexual Assault

Interview by Molly Lambert

In your new memoir, “We’re Going to Need More Wine,” you write about your experience being raped at gunpoint while working at a Payless shoe store when you were 19. The book was published as the #MeToo conversation took off, which has placed you at the forefront of the movement to end sexual harassment and assault. I’ve been doing it for two decades, but there were a lot more microphones this time around than there’s ever been. We’re now seeing how many people have dealt with sexual violence and the toll it can take. All of these disclosures — from Hollywood to farmworkers to the restaurant industry to television to music to academia — show that this is so widespread and so many people’s lives have been derailed. All you can think is, I wonder who you could have been and who you can be now? And a lot of those people are waiting for that conversation or for somebody to tell them that they can be anything, that it does not define you.

It seems as if the book was spawned by a responsibility to use your platform to educate others. What has the feedback been like? Over the last few years, I’ve started feeling worthy of my life, and the more I did, the more I realized that, yeah, maybe I can share this. I definitely got the sense that there are a lot of people who are in tremendous pain, who’ve gone through unspeakable horrors and have been suffering in silence, and the bit of time that they spent with my book made them feel seen and understood.

You open the book with a quote from W. E. B. DuBois about the double



Age: 45

Occupation:
Actress

Hometown:
Omaha

Union is the star of “Being Mary Jane” on BET. “We’re Going to Need More Wine,” is her first book. She has her own line of chardonnay, Vanilla Puddin’.

Her Top 5 Types of Wine:

1. Malbec
2. Sauvignon Blanc
3. Cabernet
4. Syrah
5. Chardonnay

consciousness that comes with being black in America, then describe having to constantly code-switch as a smart, self-conscious black girl growing up in the very white, conformist California suburb of Pleasanton. **How did you balance those two experiences?** A lot of people who experience a dual consciousness have to pretend and stifle and suppress their real feelings. You start to condition yourself, trying to figure out what the right voice is, the right tone, the right word. There are millions of actors: They’re just not in Hollywood. It’s exhausting, and it can fill you with rage.

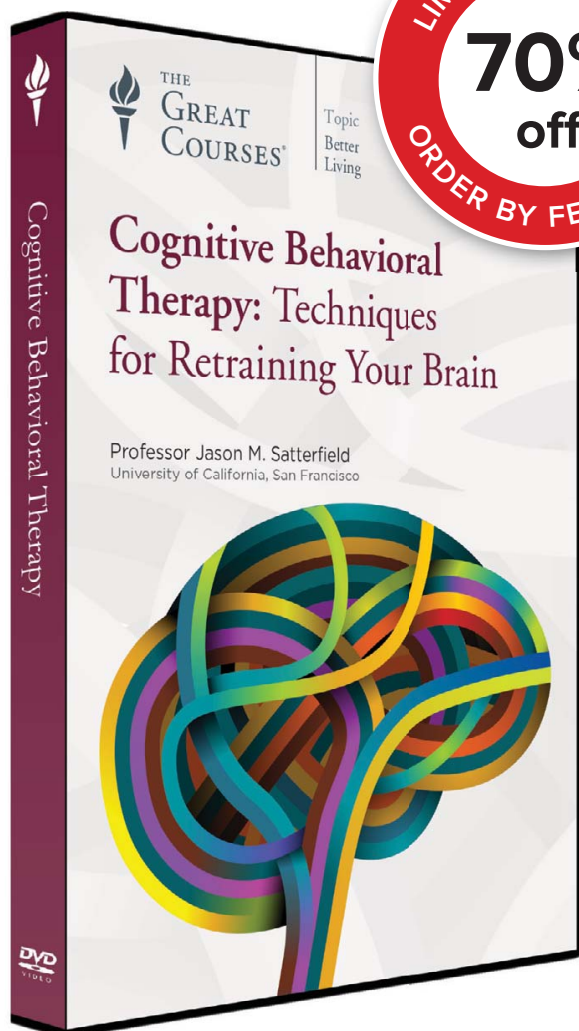
The book is largely about self-identity and survival. You write a lot about that basic human desire to be seen and recognized. Is that why you got into acting?

I wish I had that cute story where I said something like, “And then I saw ‘Miracle on 34th Street,’ and I knew this was the only thing I could do!” I got into acting because I wanted to be chosen. When you’re insecure, being chosen, whether that be by a man or by a company or by a production, by the right group of friends or the right community, is like being embraced. I was working at the bookstore at U.C.L.A., making \$6.15 an hour after three raises, and when an agent asked if I would ever consider modeling, the idea that someone might choose me based on what I look like, for an insecure person, was unbelievable. That vote of confidence was everything.

You write about how that’s one of the weird secrets of life: Self-confidence is the thing that makes people attractive.

And it’s the confidence that comes from being your most authentic self. If, in my 30s, someone asked me to name 10 things that made me happy, I would’ve said ground beef and butter and *imitation* crab — not even the real [expletive]! Most of us have no clue what makes us happy. We’re always supercritical of our spouses or our friends or our co-workers for not magically knowing how to be our friend or how to love us. And it’s like, “How do you even sign up for that when you haven’t even figured it out for yourself?”

My favorite part of the book was when you joked that people don’t know that you’ve aged, because you were known for playing teenagers for so long. It’s how life balances out. My face must have made a deal with the devil, but my lower back is telling all the tales. ♦



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